
A
DISSERTATION
ON
MIRACLES.



A
DISSERTATION
ON
MIRACLES;

CONTAINING

*An Examination of the Principles advanced by
DAVID HUME, Esq.*

IN AN ESSAY ON MIRACLES.

K
BY GEORGE CAMPBELL, D. D.

LATE PRINCIPAL OF THE MARISCHAL COLLEGE, AND ONE OF
THE MINISTERS OF ABERDEEN.

The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.

JOHN X. 25.

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1796.



TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
JOHN EARL OF BUTE,
ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S PRINCIPAL SECRETARIES OF
STATE,
CHANCELLOR OF THE MARISCHAL COLLEGE AND
UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN,
THE FOLLOWING DISSERTATION,
IN DEFENCE OF A RELIGION, OF WHICH HE IS AN
EMINENT PATRON AND EXAMPLE,
IS,
WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT
AND GRATITUDE,
INSCRIBED BY
HIS LORDSHIP'S
MOST DUTIFUL,
MOST DEVOTED,
AND
MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,

GEORGE CAMPBELL.

March 2. 1762.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

It is not the only, nor even the chief design of these sheets, to refute the reasoning and objections of Mr. Hume, with regard to miracles: the chief design of them is, to set the principal argument for Christianity in its proper light. On a subject that hath been so often treated, it is impossible to avoid saying many things which have been said before. It may, however, with reason, be affirmed, that there still remains, on this subject, great scope for new observations. Besides, it ought to be remembered, that the evidence of any complex argument depends very much on the order into which the material circumstances are digested, and the manner in which they are displayed.

The *Essay on Miracles* deserves to be considered as one of the most dangerous attacks that have been made on our religion. The danger results not solely from the merit of THE PIECE; it results much more from that of

THE AUTHOR. *The piece* itself, like every other work of Mr. Hume, is ingenious ; but its merit is more of the oratorical kind than of the philosophical. The merit of *the author*, I acknowledge, is great. The many useful volumes he hath published, of *history*, as well as on *criticism*, *politics*, and *trade*, have justly procured him, with all persons of taste and discernment, the highest reputation as a writer. What pity is it, that this reputation should have been sullied by attempts to undermine the foundations both of *natural religion*, and of *revealed* !

For my own part, I think it a piece of justice in me, to acknowledge the obligations I owe the author, before I enter on the proposed examination. I have not only been much entertained and instructed by his works ; but, if I am possessed of any talent in abstract reasoning, I am not a little indebted to what he hath written on *human nature*, for the improvement of that talent. If therefore, in this tract, I have refuted Mr. Hume's *Essay*, the greater share of the merit is perhaps to be ascribed to Mr. Hume himself. The compliment which the Russian monarch, after the famous battle of Poltowa, paid the Swedish generals, when he gave

them the honourable appellation of his *masters in the art of war*, I may, with great sincerity, pay my acute and ingenious adversary.

I shall add a few things concerning the occasion and form of the following dissertation.

Some of the principal topics here discussed, were more briefly treated in a *sermon* preached before the *synod* of ABERDEEN, and are now made public at their desire. To the end that an argument of so great importance might be more fully and freely canvassed, than it could have been, with propriety, in a sermon, it was judged necessary to new-model the discourse, and to give it that form in which it now appears.

The *edition* of Mr. Hume's *Essays* to which I always refer in this work, is that printed at LONDON, in duodecimo, 1750, intituled, *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*. I have, since finishing this tract, seen a later *edition*, in which there are a few *variations*. None of them appeared to me so material, as to give ground for altering the *quotations* and *references* here used. There is indeed one *alteration*, which candour required that I should mention: I have accordingly mentioned it in a note*.

* Page 171, 172.

The *arguments* of the essayist I have endeavoured to refute by *argument*. Mere *declamation* I know no way of refuting, but by *analysing* it; nor do I conceive how *inconsistencies* can be answered, otherwise than by *exposing* them. In such *analysis* and *exposition*, which, I own, I have attempted without ceremony or reserve, an air of *ridicule* is unavoidable: but this *ridicule*, I am well aware, if founded in *misrepresentation*, will at last rebound upon *myself*. It is possible, that, in some things, I have *mistaken* the author's meaning; I am conscious, that I have not, in any thing, designedly *misrepresented* it.

CONTENTS.

	Page
INTRODUCTION, - - - -	I

PART I.

Miracles are capable of proof from testimony, and religious miracles are not less capable of this evidence than others.

SECT. I. Mr. Hume's favourite argument is founded on a false hypothesis, - - -	7
SECT. II. Mr Hume charged with some fallacies in his way of managing the argument, -	33
SECT. III. Mr. Hume himself gives up his favourite argument, - - - -	53
SECT. IV. There is no peculiar presumption against such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion, - - -	60
SECT. V. There is a peculiar presumption in favour of such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion, - -	73
SECT. VI. Inquiry into the meaning and propriety of one of Mr. Hume's favourite maxims,	76

PART II.

The miracles on which the belief of Christianity is founded, are sufficiently attested.

	Page
SECT. I. There is no presumption arising from human nature, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity, -	8
SECT. II. There is no presumption arising from the history of mankind, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity, - - - - -	9
SECT. III. No miracles recorded by historians of other religions are subversive of the evidence arising from the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity, or can be considered as contrary testimony, - - - - -	13
SECT. IV. Examination of the PAGAN miracles mentioned by Mr. Hume, - - - - -	14
SECT. V. Examination of the POPISH miracles mentioned by Mr. Hume, - - - - -	17
SECT. VI. Abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence that there have been miracles in former times; or such events as, when compared with the present constitution of the world, would by Mr. Hume be denominated miraculous, -	20
SECT. VII. Revival of Mr. Hume's examination of the Pentateuch, - - - - -	21
Conclusion, - - - - -	23

INTRODUCTION.

“CHRISTIANITY,” it hath been said, “is not
“founded in argument.” If it were only
meant by these words, that the religion of Je-
sus could not, by the single aid of reasoning,
produce its full effect upon the heart, every
true Christian would cheerfully subscribe to
them. No arguments unaccompanied by the
influences of the Holy Spirit, can convert the
soul from sin to God; though even to such
conversion, arguments are, by the agency of
the Spirit, rendered subservient. Again, if
we were to understand by this aphorism, that
the principles of our religion could never
have been discovered, by the natural and un-
assisted faculties of man; this position, I pre-
sume, would be as little disputed as the for-
mer. But if, on the contrary, under the co-
ver of an ambiguous expression, it is intend-
ed to insinuate, that those principles, from
their very nature, can admit no rational evi-
dence of their truth, (and this, by the way,

is the only meaning which can avail our antagonists) the gospel, as well as common sense, loudly reclaims against it.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the author of our religion, often argued, both with his disciples and with his adversaries, as with reasonable men, on the principles of reason. Without this faculty, he well knew, they could not be susceptible either of religion or of law. He argued from prophecy, and the conformity of the event to the prediction *. He argued from the testimony of John the Baptist, who was generally acknowledged to be a prophet †. He argued from the miracles which he himself performed ‡, as uncontrovertible evidences, that God Almighty operated by him, and had sent him. He expostulates with his enemies that they did not use their reason on this subject. *Why, says he, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right* || ? In like manner we are called upon by the apostles of our Lord, to act the part of *wise men*, and *judge* impartially of *what they say* §. Those who do so, are highly commended, for the candour and prudence they

* Luke xxiv. 25, &c. John v. 39. & 46. † John v. 32, 33. ‡ John v. 36. x. 25. 37, 38. xiv. 10, 11. || Luke xii. 57. § 1 Cor. x. 15.

discover, in an affair of so great consequence *. We are even commanded to be *always ready to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of our hope* † ; in *meekness to instruct them that oppose themselves* ‡ ; and *earnestly to contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints* ||. God has neither in natural nor revealed religion, *left himself without a witness* ; but has in both given moral and external evidence, sufficient to convince the impartial, to silence the gainsayer, and to render inexcusable the atheist and the unbeliever. This evidence it is our duty to attend to, and candidly to examine. We must *prove all things*, as we are expressly enjoined in holy writ, if we would ever hope to *hold fast that which is good* §.

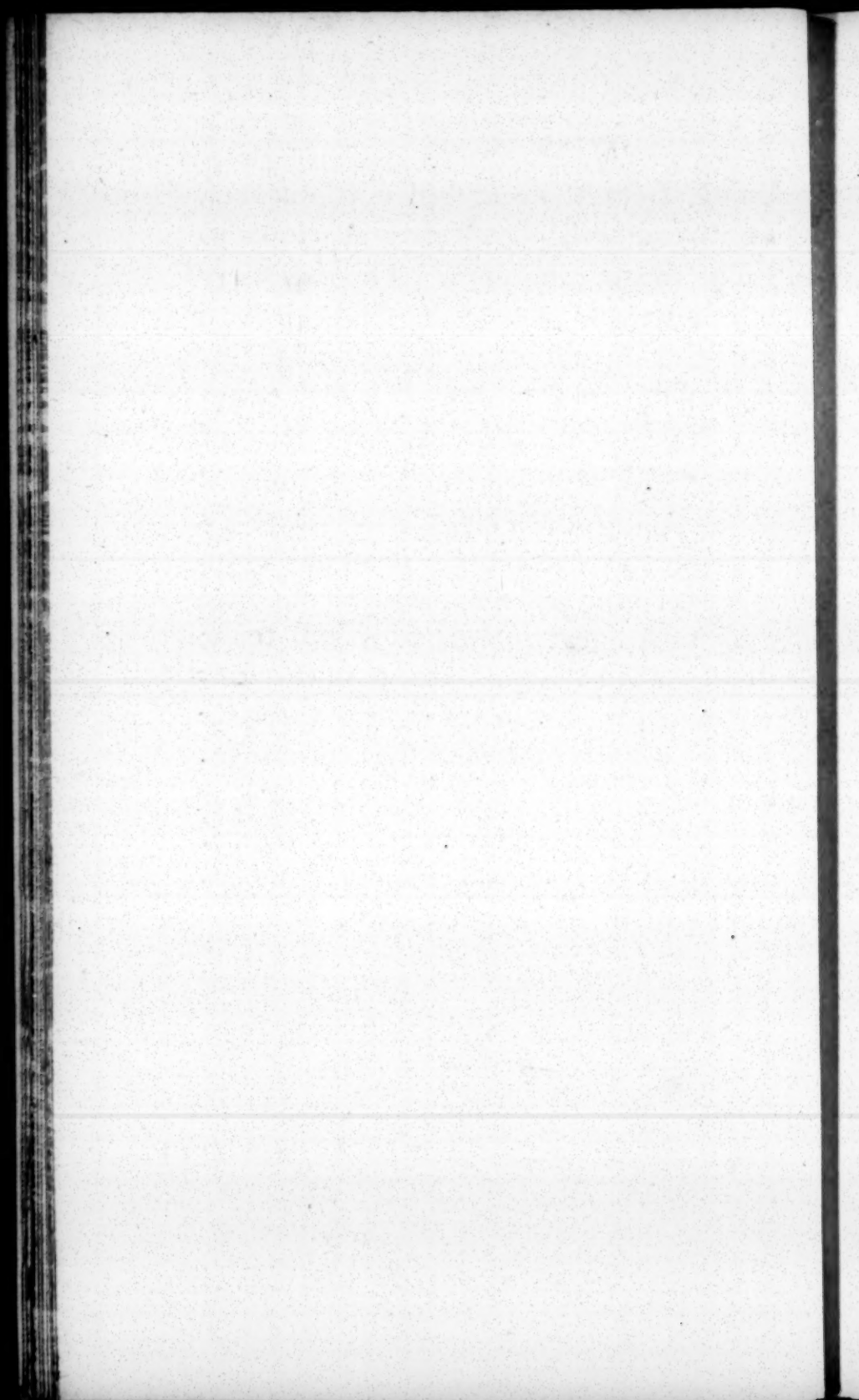
Thus much I thought proper to premise, not to serve as an apology for the design of this tract (the design surely needs no apology, whatever the world may judge of the execution), but to expose the shallowness of that pretext, under which the advocates for infidelity in this age commonly take shelter. Whilst, therefore, we enforce an argument, which, in support of our religion, was so fre-

* Acts xvii. 11. † 1 Peter iii. 15. ‡ 2 Tim.
ii. 25. || Jude 3. § 1 Thess. v. 21.

quently insisted on by its divine founder, we will not dread the reproachful titles of *dangerous friends*, or *disguised enemies* of revelation. Such are the titles, which the writer, whose sentiments we propose in these papers to canvass, hath bestowed on his antagonists*; not, I believe, through malice against them, but as a sort of excuse for himself, or at least a handle for introducing a very strange and unmeaning compliment to the religion of his country, after a very bold attempt to undermine it. We will however do him the justice to own, that he hath put it out of our power to retort the charge. No intelligent person, who hath carefully perused the *Essay on Miracles*, will impute to the author either of those ignominious characters.

My *primary* intention in undertaking an answer to the aforesaid essay, hath invariably been, to contribute all in my power, to the defence of a *religion*, which I esteem the greatest blessing conferred by Heaven on the sons of men. It is at the same time a *secondary* motive of considerable weight, to vindicate *philosophy*, at least that most important branch of it which ascertains the rules of

reasoning, from those absurd consequences, which this author's theory naturally leads us to. The theme is arduous. The adversary is both subtle and powerful. With such an adversary, I should on very unequal terms enter the lists, had I not the advantage of being on the side of truth. And an eminent advantage this doubtless is. It requires but moderate abilities to speak in defence of a good cause. A good cause demands but a distinct exposition and a fair hearing; and we may say with great propriety, it will speak for itself. But to adorn error with the semblance of truth, and *make the worse appear the better reason*, requires all the arts of ingenuity and invention; arts in which few or none have been more expert than Mr. Hume. It is much to be regretted, that on some occasions he hath so ill applied them.



A

DISSERTATION

ON

M I R A C L E S.

PART I.

Miracles are capable of proof from testimony, and religious miracles are not less capable of this evidence than others.

SECT. I.

Mr. Hume's favourite argument is founded on a false hypothesis.

IT is not the aim of this author to evince; that miracles, if admitted to be true, would not be a sufficient evidence of a divine mission. His design is solely to prove, that miracles which have not been the objects of our own senses, at least such as are said to have been performed in attestation of any religious system, cannot reasonably be admitted by us, or believed on the testimony of others. "A.

“ miracle,” says he, “ supported by any human testimony, is more properly a subject of derision than of argument *.” Again, in the conclusion of his essay, “ Upon the whole, it appears, that no testimony for any kind of miracle, can ever possibly amount to a probability, much less to a proof †.” Here he concludes against all miracles. “ *Any kind of miracle*” are his express words. He seems, however, immediately sensible, that in asserting this, he hath gone too far ; and therefore, in the end of the same paragraph, retracts part of what he had advanced in the beginning. “ We may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force, as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any system of religion.” In the note on this passage, he has these words: “ I beg the limitation here made, may be remarked, when I say, that a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion. For I own that otherwise there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind, as to admit of proof from human testimony.”

* P. 194.

† P. 202.

So much for that cardinal point, which the essayist labours so strenuously to evince; and which, if true, will not only be subversive of revelation, as received by us, on the testimony of the apostles, and prophets, and martyrs; but will directly lead to this general conclusion: "That it is impossible for God Almighty to give a revelation, attended with such evidence, that it can be reasonably believed in after ages, or even in the same age, by any person who hath not been an eye witness of the miracles, by which it is supported."

Now by what wonderful process of reasoning is this strange conclusion made out? Several topics have been employed for the purpose by this subtle disputant. Among these there is one principal argument, which he is at great pains to set off, to the best advantage. Here indeed he claims a particular concern, having discovered it himself. His title to the honour of the discovery, it is not my business to controvert; I confine myself entirely to the consideration of its importance. To this end I shall now lay before the reader, the unanswerable argument, as he flatters himself it will be found; taking the freedom,

for brevity's sake, to compendize the reasoning, and to omit whatever is said merely for illustration. To do otherwise would lay me under the necessity of transcribing the greater part of the essay.

“ Experience,” says he, “ is our only guide
“ in reasoning concerning matters of fact *.
“ Experience is in some things variable, in
“ some things uniform. A variable experi-
“ ence gives rise only to probability ; an
“ uniform experience amounts to a proof †.
“ Probability always supposes an opposition
“ of experiments and observations, where the
“ one side is found to overbalance the other,
“ and to produce a degree of evidence pro-
“ portioned to the superiority. In such cases
“ we must balance the opposite experiments,
“ and deduct the lesser number from the
“ greater, in order to know the exact force
“ of the superior evidence ‡. Our belief or
“ assurance of any fact from the report of
“ eye-witnesses, is derived from no other
“ principle than experience ; that is, our ob-
“ servation of the veracity of human testi-
“ mony, and of the usual conformity of facts
“ to the reports of witnesses ||. Now, if the
“ fact attested partakes of the marvellous, if

* P. 174. † P. 175, 176. ‡ P. 176. || Ibid.

“ it is such as has seldom fallen under our
“ observation, here is a contest of two oppo-
“ site experiences, of which the one destroys
“ the other, as far as its force goes; and the
“ superior can only operate on the mind by
“ the force which remains: The very same
“ principle of experience, which gives us a
“ certain degree of assurance, in the testi-
“ mony of witnesses, gives us also, in this
“ case, another degree of assurance, against
“ the fact which they endeavour to establish;
“ from which contradiction, there necessarily
“ arises a counterpoise, and mutual destruc-
“ tion of belief and authority *. Further, if
“ the fact affirmed by the witnesses, instead
“ of being only marvellous, is really mira-
“ culous; if besides, the testimony consider-
“ ed apart and in itself, amounts to an entire
“ proof; in that case there is proof against
“ proof, of which the strongest must prevail,
“ but still with a diminution of its force, in
“ proportion to that of its antagonist. A
“ miracle is a violation of the laws of nature;
“ and as a firm and unalterable experience
“ has established these laws, the proof against
“ a miracle, from the very nature of the fact,
“ is as entire, as any argument from experi-

* P. 179.

“ence can possibly be imagined†. And if
“so, it is an undeniable consequence, that it
“cannot be surmounted by any proof what-
“ever from testimony. A miracle, there-
“fore, however attested, can never be ren-
“dered credible, even in the lowest degree.”
This, in my apprehension, is the sum of the
argument, on which my ingenious opponent
rests the strength of his cause.

IN answer to this, I propose first to prove,
that the whole is built upon a false hypothe-
sis. That the evidence of testimony is de-
rived solely from experience, which seems to
be an axiom of this writer, is at least not so
incontestible a truth, as he supposes it; that,
on the contrary, testimony hath a natural and
original influence on belief, antecedent to ex-
perience, will, I imagine, easily be evinced.
For this purpose, let it be remarked, that the
earliest assent, which is given to testimony by
children, and which is previous to all experi-
ence, is in fact the most unlimited; that by
a gradual experience of mankind, it is gra-
dually contracted, and reduced to narrower
bounds. To say, therefore, that our diffidence
in testimony is the result of experience, is

† P. 180.

more philosophical, because more consonant to truth, than to say that our faith in testimony has this foundation. Accordingly, youth, which is unexperienced, is credulous; age, on the contrary, is distrustful. Exactly the reverse would be the case, were this author's doctrine just.

Perhaps it will be said, If experience is allowed to be the only measure of a logical or reasonable faith in testimony, the question, *Whether the influence of testimony on belief, be original or derived?* if it is not merely verbal, is at least of no importance in the present controversy. But I maintain it is of the greatest importance. The difference between us is by no means so inconsiderable, as to a careless view it may appear. According to his philosophy, the presumption is against the testimony, or (which amounts to the same thing) there is not the smallest presumption in its favour, till properly supported by experience. According to the explication given above, there is the strongest presumption in favour of the testimony, till properly refuted by experience.

If it be objected by the author, that such a faith in testimony as is prior to experience, must be unreasonable and unphilosophical,

because unaccountable ; I should reply, that there are, and must be, in human nature, some original grounds of belief, beyond which our researches cannot proceed, and of which, therefore, it is vain to attempt a rational account. I should desire the objector to give a reasonable account of his faith in this principle, that *similar causes always produce similar effects* ; or in this, that *the course of nature will be the same to-morrow that it was yesterday, and is to-day* : principles, which he himself acknowledges, are neither intuitively evident, nor deduced from premises ; and which nevertheless we are under a necessity of presupposing, in all our reasonings from experience *. I should desire him to give a reasonable account of his faith in the clearest informations of his memory, which he will find it alike impossible either to doubt or to explain. Indeed memory bears nearly the same relation to experience, that testimony does. Certain it is, that the defects and misrepresentations of memory are often corrected by experience. Yet, should any person hence infer, that memory derives all its evidence from experience, he would fall into a manifest absurdity. For, on the contrary, experi-

* Sceptical Doubts, Part 2.

ence derives its origin solely from memory, and is nothing else but the general maxims or conclusions we have formed, from the comparison of particular facts remembered. If we had not previously given an implicit faith to memory, we had never been able to acquire experience. When, therefore, we say that memory, which gives birth to experience, may, nevertheless, in some instances be corrected by experience, no more is implied, but that the inferences formed from the most lively and perspicuous reports of memory, sometimes serve to rectify the mistakes which arise from such reports of this faculty as are most languid and confused. Thus, memory, in these instances, may be said to correct itself. The case is often much the same with experience and testimony, as will appear more clearly in the second section, where I shall consider the ambiguity of the word *experience*, as used by this author.

BUT how, says Mr. Hume, is testimony then to be refuted? Principally in one or other of these two ways: *first*, and most directly, by contradictory testimony; that is, when an equal or greater number of witnesses, equally or more credible, attest the contrary: *se-*

condly, by such evidence either of the incapacity or baseness of the witnesses, as is sufficient to discredit them. What, rejoins my antagonist, cannot then testimony be confuted by the extraordinary nature of the fact attested? Has this consideration no weight at all? That this consideration hath no weight at all, it was never my intention to maintain; that by itself it can very rarely, if ever, amount to a refutation against ample and unexceptionable testimony, I hope to make extremely plain. Who hath ever denied, that the uncommonness of an event related, is a presumption against its reality; and that chiefly on account of the tendency, which, experience teacheth us, and this author hath observed, some people have to sacrifice truth to the love of wonder *? The question only is, How far does this presumption extend? In the extent which Mr. Hume hath assigned it, he hath greatly exceeded the limits of nature, and consequently of all just reasoning.

In his opinion, " When the fact attested
" is such as has seldom fallen under our ob-
" servation, there is a contest of two oppo-
" site experiences, of which the one destroys

* P. 184.

“ the other, as far as its force goes, and the
“ superior can only operate on the mind, by
“ the force which remains †.” There is a
metaphysical, I had almost said, a magical
balance and *arithmetic*, for the weighing and
subtracting of evidence, to which he fre-
quently recurs, and with which he seems to
fancy he can perform wonders. I wish he had
been a little more explicit in teaching us how
these rare inventions must be used. When a
writer of genius and elocution expresses him-
self in general terms, he will find it an easy
matter, to give a plausible appearance to
things the most unintelligible in nature. Such
sometimes is this author’s way of writing. In
the instance before us he is particularly hap-
py in his choice of metaphors. They are
such as are naturally adapted to prepossess a
reader in his favour. What candid person
can think of suspecting the impartiality of
an inquirer, who is for *weighing* in the *scales*
of reason, all the arguments on either side?
Who can suspect his exactness who deter-
mines every thing by a *numerical computa-
tion*? Hence it is, that to a superficial view
his reasoning appears scarce inferior to de-
monstration; but, when narrowly canvassed,

it is impracticable to find an application, of which, in a consistency with good sense, it is capable.

In confirmation of the remark just now made, let us try how his manner of arguing on this point can be applied to a particular instance. For this purpose I make the following supposition. I have lived for some years near a ferry. It consists with my knowledge that the passage-boat has a thousand times crossed the river, and as many times returned safe. An unknown man, whom I have just now met, tells me in a serious manner, that it is lost; and affirms, that he himself standing on the bank, was a spectator of the scene; that he saw the passengers carried down the stream, and the boat overwhelmed. No person, who is influenced in his judgment of things, not by philosophical subtilties, but by common sense, a much surer guide, will hesitate to declare, that in such a testimony I have probable evidence of the fact asserted. But if leaving common sense, I shall recur to metaphysics, and submit to be tutored in my way of judging by the essayist, he will remind me, "that there is here a contest of two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes

“ and the superior can only operate on the
“ mind by the force which remains.” I am
warned, that “ the very same principle of
“ experience, which gives me a certain de-
“ gree of assurance in the testimony of the
“ witness, gives me also, in this case, another
“ degree of assurance, against the fact, which
“ he endeavours to establish, from which con-
“ tradiction there arises a counterpoise, and
“ mutual destruction of belief and autho-
“ rity *.” Well, I would know the truth,
if possible; and that I may conclude fairly
and philosophically, how must I balance these
opposite experiences, as you are pleased to
term them? Must I set the thousand, or ra-
ther the two thousand instances of the one
side, against the single instance of the other?
In that case, it is easy to see, I have nineteen
hundred and ninety-nine degrees of evidence,
that my information is false. Or is it neces-
sary, in order to make it credible, that the
single instance have two thousand times as
much evidence, as any of the opposite in-
stances, supposing them equal among them-
selves; or supposing them unequal, as much
as all the two thousand put together, that
there may be at least an equilibrium? This

* P. 179.

is impossible. I had for some of those instances, the evidence of sense, which hardly any testimony can equal, much less exceed. Once more must the evidence I have of the veracity of the witness be a full equivalent to the two thousand instances which oppose the fact attested? By the supposition, I have no positive evidence for or against his veracity, he being a person whom I never saw before. Yet if none of these be the balancing, which the essay-writer means, I despair of being able to discover his meaning.

Is then so weak a proof from testimony incapable of being refuted? I am far from thinking so; though even so weak a proof could not be overturned by such a contrary experience. How then may it be overturned? *First*, by contradictory testimony. Going homewards I meet another person, whom I know as little as I did the former; finding that he comes from the ferry, I ask him concerning the truth of the report. He affirms, that the whole is a fiction; that he saw the boat, and all in it, come safe to land. This would do more to turn the scale, than fifty thousand such contrary instances, as were supposed. Yet this would not remove suspicion. Indeed, if we were to consider the matter ab-

strictly, one would think, that all suspicion would be removed, that the two opposite testimonies would destroy each other, and leave the mind entirely under the influence of its former experience, in the same state as if neither testimony had been given. But this is by no means consonant to fact. When once testimonies are introduced, former experience is generally of no account in the reckoning; it is but like the dust of the balance, which hath not any sensible effect upon the scales. The mind hangs in suspense between the two contrary declarations, and considers it as one to one, or equal in probability, that the report is true, or that it is false. Afterwards a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, confirm the declaration of the second. I am then quite at ease. Is this the only effectual way of confuting false testimony? No. I suppose *again*, that instead of meeting with any person who can inform me concerning the fact, I get from some, who are acquainted with the witness, information concerning his character. They tell me, he is notorious for lying; and that his lies are commonly forged, not with a view to interest, but merely to gratify a malicious pleasure, which he takes in alarming strangers. This, though not so direct a refu-

tation as the former, will be sufficient to discredit his report. In the former, where there is testimony contradicting testimony, the author's metaphor of a balance may be used with propriety. The things weighed are homogenous: and when contradictory evidences are presented to the mind, tending to prove positions which cannot be both true, the mind must decide on the comparative strength of the opposite evidences, before it yield to either.

But is this the case in the supposition first made? By no means. The two thousand instances formerly known, and the single instance attested, as they relate to different facts, though of a contrary nature, are not contradictory. There is no inconsistency in believing both. There is no inconsistency in receiving the last on weaker evidence (if it be sufficient evidence), not only than all the former together, but even than any of them singly. Will it be said, that though the former instances are not themselves contradictory to the fact recently attested, they lead to a conclusion that is contradictory? I answer, It is true, that the experienced frequency of the conjunction of any two events, leads the mind to infer a similar conjunction

in time to come. But let it at the same time be remarked, that no man considers this inference, as having equal evidence with any one of those past events, on which it is founded, and for the belief of which we have had sufficient testimony. Before then the method recommended by this author can turn to any account, it will be necessary for him to compute and determine with precision, how many hundreds, how many thousands, I might say how many myriads of instances, will confer such evidence on the conclusion founded on them, as will prove an equipoise for the testimony of one ocular witness, a man of probity, in a case of which he is allowed to be a competent judge.

There is in *arithmetic* a rule called REDUCTION, by which numbers of different denominations are brought to the same denomination. If this ingenious author shall invent a rule in *logic*, analogous to this, for reducing different classes of evidence to the same class, he will bless the world with a most important discovery. Then, indeed, he will have the honour to establish an everlasting peace in the republic of letters ; then we shall have the happiness to see controversy of every kind, theological, historical, philosophical, receive

its mortal wound : for though, in every question, we could not even then determine with certainty, on which side the truth lay, we could always determine (and that is the utmost the nature of the thing admits) with as much accuracy as geometry and algebra can afford, on which side the probability lay, and in what degree. But till this metaphysical *reduction* is discovered, it will be impossible, where the evidences are of different orders, to ascertain by *subtraction* the superior evidence. We could not but esteem him a novice in arithmetic, who being asked, whether seven pounds or eleven pence make the greater sum, and what is the difference? should by attending solely to the numbers, and overlooking the value, conclude that eleven pence were the greater, and that it exceeded the other by four. Must we not be equal novices in reasoning, if we follow the same absurd method? Must we not fall into as great blunders? Of as little significance do we find the balance. Is the value of things heterogeneous to be determined merely by weight? Shall silver be weighed against lead, or copper against iron? If in exchange for a piece of gold, I were offered some counters of baser metal, is it not obvious, that till I know the

comparative value of the metals, in vain shall I attempt to find what is equivalent, by the assistance either of scales or arithmetic?

It is an excellent observation, and much to the purpose, which the late learned and pious Bishop of Durham, in his admirable performance on the analogy of religion to the course of nature, hath made on this subject. "There is a very strong presumption," says he, "against the most ordinary facts, before the proof of them, which yet is overcome by almost any proof. There is a presumption of millions to one against the story of Cæsar, or of any other man. For suppose a number of common facts, so and so circumstanced, of which one had no kind of proof, should happen to come into one's thoughts, every one would, without any possible doubt, conclude them to be false. The like may be said of a single common fact *." What then, I may subjoin, shall be said of an uncommon fact? And that an uncommon fact may be proved by testimony, hath not *yet* been made a question. But, in order to illustrate the observation above cited, suppose, first, one at random mentions, that at such an

* Part 2. chap. 2. § 3.

hour, of such a day, in such a part of the heavens, a comet *will* appear; the conclusion from experience would not be as millions, but as infinite to one, that the proposition is false. Instead of this, suppose you have the testimony of but one ocular witness, a man of integrity, and skilled in astronomy, that at such an hour, of such a day, in such a part of the heavens, a comet *did* appear; you will not hesitate one moment to give him credit. Yet all the presumption that was against the truth of the first supposition, though almost as strong evidence as experience can afford, was also against the truth of the second, before it was thus attested.

Is it necessary to urge farther, in support of this doctrine, that as the water in the canal cannot be made to rise higher than the fountain whence it flows, so it is impossible, that the evidence of testimony, if it proceeded from experience, should ever exceed that of experience, which is its source? yet that it greatly exceeds this evidence, appears not only from what hath been observed already, but still more, from what I shall have occasion to observe in the sequel. One may safely affirm, that no conceivable con-

Conclusion from experience, can possess stronger evidence, than that which ascertains us of the regular succession and duration of day and night. The reason is, the instances on which this experience is founded, are both without number and without exception. Yet even this conclusion, the author admits, as we shall see in the third section, may, in a particular instance, not only be surmounted, but even annihilated, by testimony.

Lastly, let it be observed, that the immediate conclusion from experience is always *general*, and runs thus : " This is the ordinary course of nature." " Such an event may reasonably be expected, where all the circumstances are entirely similar." But when we descend to particulars, the conclusion becomes weaker, being more indirect. For though all the *known* circumstances be similar, all the *actual* circumstances may not be similar : nor is it possible in any case to be assured (our knowledge of things being at best but superficial), that all the *actual* circumstances are *known* to us. On the contrary, the direct conclusion from testimony is always *particular*, and runs thus : " This is the fact in such an individual instance." The remark now made

will serve both to throw light on some of the preceding observations, and to indicate the proper sphere of each species of evidence. *Experience* of the past is the only rule whereby we can judge concerning the future: And as when the sun is below the horizon, we must do the best we can by the light of the moon, or even of the stars; so in all cases where we have no testimony, we are under a necessity of recurring to experience, and of balancing or numbering contrary observations *. But the evidence resulting hence, even in the clearest cases,

* Wherever such balancing or numbering can take place, the opposite evidences must be entirely similar. It will rarely assist us in judging of facts supported by testimony; for even where contradictory testimonies come to be considered, you will hardly find, that the characters of the witnesses on the opposite sides are precisely equal, as that an arithmetical operation will evolve the credibility. In matters of pure experience it hath often place. Hence the computations that have been made of the value of annuities, insurances, and several other commercial articles. In calculations concerning chances, the degree of probability may be determined with mathematical exactness. I shall here take the liberty, though the matter be not essential to the design of this tract, to correct an oversight in the essayist, who always supposes, that where contrary evidences must be balanced, the probability lies in the remainder or surplus, when the less number is subtracted

acknowledged to be so weak, compared with that which results from testimony, that the strongest conviction, built merely on the former, may be overturned by the slightest proof exhibited by the latter. Accordingly, the future hath, in all ages and nations, been denominated the province of conjecture and uncertainty.

FROM what hath been said, the attentive reader will easily discover, that the author's argument against *miracles*, hath not the least affinity to the argument used by Dr. Tillotson against *transubstantiation*, with which Mr. Hume hath introduced his subject. Let

be deduced from the greater. The probability doth not consist in the surplus, but in the ratio, or geometrical proportion, which the numbers on the opposite sides bear to each other. I explain myself thus: In favour of one supposed event, there are 100 similar instances, against 50. In another case under consideration, the favourable instances are 60, and only 10 unfavourable. Though the difference, or arithmetical proportion, which is 50, be the same in both cases, the probability is by no means equal, as the author's way of reasoning implies. The probability of the first event is as 100 to 50, or 2 to 1. The probability of the second is as 60 to 10, or 6 to 1. Consequently, on comparing the different examples, though both be probable, the second is thrice as probable as the first.

us hear the argument, as it is related in the
Essay, from the writings of the Archbishop
“ It is acknowledged on all hands, says that
“ learned prelate, that the authority either
“ of the scripture or of tradition, is founde
“ ed merely on the testimony of the aposto
“ les, who were eye-witnesses to those mi
“ racles of our Saviour, by which he prove
“ ed his divine mission. Our evidence
“ then, for the truth of the Christian reli
“ gion, is less than the evidence for the
“ truth of our senses; because, even in the
“ first authors of our religion, it was no
“ greater; and it is evident, it must dimi
“ nish in passing from them to their disci
“ ples; nor can any one be so certain of
“ the truth of their testimony, as of the im
“ mediate objects of his senses. But a weaker
“ evidence can never destroy a stronger;
“ and therefore, were the doctrine of the
“ real presence ever so clearly revealed in
“ scripture, it were directly contrary to the
“ rules of just reasoning, to give our assent
“ to it. It contradicts sense, though both
“ the scripture and tradition, on which it is
“ supposed to be built, carry not such evi
“ dence with them as sense, when they are
“ considered merely as external evidences,

“ and are not brought home to every one’s
“ breast, by the immediate operation of the
“ Holy Spirit *.” That the evidence of
testimony is less than the evidence of *sense*,
is undeniable. *Sense* is the source of that
evidence, which is first transferred to the
memory of the individual, as to a general re-
servoir, and thence transmitted to others by
the channel of *testimony*. That the origi-
nal evidence can never gain any thing, but
must lose, by the transmission, is beyond
dispute. What hath been rightly perceiv-
ed may be misremembered ; what is right-
ly remembered may, through incapacity, or
through ill intention, be misreported ; and
what is rightly reported may be misunder-
stood. In any of these four ways, there-
fore, either by defect of memory, of elocu-
tion, or of veracity in the relater, or by mis-
apprehension in the hearer, there is a chance,
that the truth received by the information
of the senses, may be misrepresented or mis-
taken ; now every such chance occasions a
real diminution of the evidence. That the
sacramental elements are bread and wine,
not flesh and blood, our sight and touch,
and taste and smell concur in testifying. If

* P. 173, 174.

these senses are not to be credited, the apostles themselves could not have evidence of the mission of their master. For the greatest external evidence they had, or could have, of his mission, was that which their senses gave them, of the reality of his miracles. But whatever strength there is in this argument with regard to the apostles, the argument with regard to us, who, for those miracles, have only the evidence, not of our own senses, but of their testimony, is incomparably stronger. In their case, it is sense contradicting sense; in ours, it is sense contradicting testimony. But what relation has this to the author's argument? None at all. Testimony, it is acknowledged, is a weaker evidence than sense. But it hath been already evinced, that its evidence for particular facts is infinitely stronger than that which the general conclusions from experience can afford us. Testimony holds directly of memory and sense. Whatever is duly attested must be remembered by the witness; whatever is duly remembered must once have been perceived. But nothing similar takes place with regard to experience, nor can

testimony, with any appearance of meaning, be said to hold of it.

Thus I have shown, as I proposed, that the author's reasoning proceeds on a false hypothesis.—It supposeth testimony to derive its evidence solely from experience, which is false.—It supposeth by consequence, that contrary observations have a weight in opposing testimony, which the first and most acknowledged principles of human reason, or, if you like the term better, common sense, evidently shows that they have not.—It assigns a rule for discovering the superiority of contrary evidences, which, in the latitude there given it, tends to mislead the judgment, and which it is impossible, by any explication, to render of real use.

SECT. II.

Mr. Hume charged with some fallacies in his way of managing the argument.

IN the essay there is frequent mention of the word *experience*, and much use made of it. It is strange that the author hath not favoured us with the definition of a term of

so much moment to his argument. This defect I shall endeavour to supply; and the rather, as the word appears to be equivocal, and to be used by the essayist in two very different senses. The first and most proper signification of the word, which, for distinction's sake, I shall call *personal* experience, is that given in the preceding section. "It is," as was observed, "founded in *memory*, and consists solely of the general maxims or conclusions, that each individual hath formed, from the comparison of the particular facts he hath remembered." In the other signification, in which the word is sometimes taken, and which I shall distinguish by the term *derived*, it may be thus defined: "It is founded in *testimony*, and consists not only of all the experiences of others, which have through that channel been communicated to us, but of all the general maxims or conclusions we have formed, from the comparison of particular facts attested."

In proposing his argument, the author would surely be understood to mean only *personal* experience; otherwise, his making testimony derive its light from an experience which derives its light from testimony,

would be introducing what logicians term a *circle in causes*. It would exhibit the same things alternately, as causes and effects of each other. Yet nothing can be more limited than the sense which is conveyed under the term *experience*, in the first acceptance. The merest clown or peasant derives incomparably more knowledge from testimony, and the communicated experience of others, than in the longest life he could have amassed out of the treasure of his own memory. Nay, to such a scanty portion the savage himself is not confined. If that therefore must be the rule, the only rule, by which every testimony is ultimately to be judged, our belief in matters of fact must have very narrow bounds. No testimony ought to have any weight with us, that doth not relate an event, similar at least to some one observation which we ourselves have had access to make. For example, that there are such people on the earth as negroes, could not, on that hypothesis, be rendered credible to one who had never seen a negroe, not even by the most numerous and the most unexceptionable attestations. Against the admission of such testimony, however strong, the whole force

of the author's argument evidently operates. But that innumerable absurdities would flow from this principle, I might easily evince, did I not think the task superfluous.

The author himself is aware of the consequences ; and therefore, in whatever sense he uses the term *experience* in proposing his argument ; in prosecuting it, he with great dexterity shifts the sense, and ere the reader is apprised, insinuates another. " It is a " miracle," says he, " that a dead man " should come to life, because that has never been observed in any age or country. " There must therefore be an uniform experience against every miraculous event, " otherwise the event would not merit that " appellation *." Here the phrase, *an uniform experience against an event*, in the latter clause, is implicitly defined in the former, not what has never been observed by us, but (mark his words) *what has never been observed* IN ANY AGE OR COUNTRY. Now, what has been observed, and what has not been observed, in all ages and countries, pray how can you, Sir, or I, or any man, come to the knowledge of? Only I suppose by

* P. 181.

testimony, oral or written. The personal experience of every individual is limited to but a part of one age, and commonly to a narrow spot of one country. If there be any other way of being made acquainted with facts, it is to me, I own, an impenetrable secret ; I have no apprehension of it. If there be not any, what shall we make of that cardinal point, on which his argument turns? It is in plain language, " Testimony is not entitled to the least degree of faith, but as far as it is supported by such an extensive experience, as if we had not had a previous and independent faith in testimony, we could never have acquired."

How natural is the transition from one sophism to another ! You will soon be convinced of this, if you attend but a little to the strain of the argument. " A miracle," says he, " is a violation of the laws of nature ; and as a firm and unalterable experience hath established these laws, the proof against a miracle is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined *." Again, " As an uniform

* P. 180.

“ experience amounts to a proof, there is
“ here a direct and full proof, from the na-
“ ture of the fact, against the existence of
“ any miracle *.” I must once more ask
the author, What is the precise meaning of
the words *firm, unalterable, uniform*? An
experience that admits no exception, is sure-
ly the only experience, which can, with
propriety, be termed *uniform, firm, unalter-
able*. Now since, as was remarked above,
the far greater part of this experience,
which compriseth every age and every
country, must be derived to us from testi-
mony; that the experience may be *firm,
uniform, unalterable*, there must be no con-
trary testimony whatever. Yet by the au-
thor’s own hypothesis, the miracles he would
thus confute, are supported by testimony.
At the same time, to give strength to his
argument, he is under a necessity of sup-
posing, that there is no exception from the
testimonies against them. Thus he falls in-
to that paralogism, which is called *begging
the question*. What he gives with one hand,
he takes with the other. He admits, in
opening his design, what in his argument
he implicitly denies.

But that this, if possible, may be still more manifest, let us attend a little to some expressions, which one would imagine he had inadvertently dropt. "So long," says he, "as the world endures, I presume, will the accounts of miracles and prodigies be found in all profane history*." Why does he presume so? A man so much attached to experience, can hardly be suspected to have any other reason than this; because such accounts have hitherto been found in all the histories, profane as well as sacred, of times past. But we need not recur to an inference to obtain this acknowledgment. It is often to be met with in the essay. In one place we learn, that the witnesses for miracles are an infinite number†; in another, that all religious records, of whatever kind, abound with them‡. I leave it therefore to the author to explain, with what consistency he can assert, that the laws of nature are established by an uniform experience (which experience is chiefly the result of testimony) and at the same time allow, that almost all human histories are full of the relations of miracles and prodigies, which are violations of those

* P. 174. † P. 190. ‡ P. 191.

laws. Here is, by his own confession, testimony against testimony, and very ample on both sides. How then can one side claim a firm, uniform, and unalterable support from testimony?

It will be in vain to object, that the testimony in support of the laws of nature, greatly exceeds the testimony for the violations of these laws; and that, if we are to be determined by the greater number of observations, we shall reject all miracles whatever. I ask, Why are the testimonies much more numerous in the one case than in the other? The answer is obvious: Natural occurrences are much more frequent than such as are preternatural. But are all the accounts we have of the pestilence to be rejected as incredible, because, in this country, we hear not so often of that disease as of the fever? Or, because the number of natural births is infinitely greater than that of monsters, shall the evidence of the former be regarded as a confutation of all that can be advanced in proof of the latter? Such an objector needs to be reminded of what was proved in the foregoing section; that the opposite testimonies relate to different facts, and are therefore not contra-

dictory; that the conclusion founded on them, possesseth not the evidence of the facts on which it is founded, but only such a presumptive evidence as may be surmounted by the slightest positive proof. A general conclusion from experience is in comparison but presumptive and indirect; sufficient testimony for a particular fact is direct and positive evidence.

I SHALL remark one other fallacy in this author's reasoning, before I conclude this section. "The Indian prince," says he, "who refused to believe the first relations concerning the effects of frost, reasoned justly; and it naturally required very strong testimony to engage his assent to facts, which arose from a state of nature, with which he was unacquainted, and bore so little analogy to those events, of which he had had constant and uniform experience. Though they were not contrary to his experience, they were not conformable to it *." Here a distinction is artfully suggested, between what is *contrary* to experience, and what is *not conformable* to it. The one he allows may be proved by testimony, but not the other. A distinc-

* P. 179.

tion, for which the author seems to have so great use, it will not be improper to examine.

If my reader happen to be but little acquainted with Mr. Hume's writings, or even with the piece here examined, I must entreat him, ere he proceed any farther, to give the essay an attentive perusal; and to take notice particularly, whether in one single passage he can find any other sense given to the terms *contrary to experience*, but that which has *not* been *experienced*. Without this aid, I should not be surpris'd, that I found it difficult to convince the judicious, that a man of so much acuteness, one so much a philosopher as this author, should, with such formality, make a distinction, which not only the essay, but the whole tenor of his philosophical writings, shows evidently to have no meaning. Is that which is contrary to experience a synonymous phrase for that which implies a contradiction? If this were the case, there would be no need to recur to experience for a refutation; it would refute itself. But it is equitable that the author himself be heard, who ought to be the best interpreter of his own words. "When the fact attest-

“ed,” says he, is such a one, as has seldom
“fallen under our observation, here is a
“contest of two opposite experiences*.”
In this passage, not the being *never* experi-
enced, but even the being *seldom* experi-
enced, constitutes an *opposite* experience. I
can conceive no way but one, that the au-
thor can evade the force of this quotation ;
and that is, by obtruding on us, some new
distinction between an *opposite* and a *contra-*
ry experience. In order to preclude such
an attempt, I shall once more recur to his
own authority. “ ’Tis no miracle that a
“man in seeming good health, should die
“of a sudden.” Why ? “ Because such a
“kind of death, though more unusual than
“any other, hath yet been frequently ob-
“served to happen. But it is a miracle
“that a dead man should come to life.”
Why ? Not because of any inconsistency in
the thing. That a body should be this hour
inanimate, and the next animated, is no
more inconsistent, than the reverse, that it
should be this hour animated, and the next
inanimate ; though the one be common,
and not the other. But the author himself
answers the question : “ Because that has

* P. 179.

“ never been observed in any age or country *.” All the contrariety then that there is in miracles to experience, doth, by his own concession, consist solely in this, that they have never been observed ; that is, they are not conformable to experience. To his experience, personal or derived, he must certainly mean ; to what he has had access to learn of different ages and countries. To speak beyond the knowledge he hath attained, would be ridiculous. It would be first supposing a miracle, and then inferring a contrary experience, instead of concluding from experience, that the fact is miraculous.

Now I insist, that as far as regards the author’s argument, a fact perfectly unusual, or not conformable to our experience, such a fact as, for aught we have had access to learn, was never observed in any age or country, is as incapable of proof from testimony as miracles are ; that, if this writer would argue consistently, he could never, on his own principles, reject the one, and admit the other. Both ought to be rejected, or neither. I would not, by this, be thought to signify, that there is no differ-

* P. 181.

ence between a miracle and an extraordinary event. I know that the former implies the interposal of an invifible agent, which is not implied in the latter. All that I intend to assert, is, that the author's argument equally affects them both. Why doth fuch interposal appear to him incredible? Not from any incongruity he discerns in the thing itfelf. He doth not pretend to it. But it is not conformable to his experience. "A miracle," fays he, "is "a tranfgreffion of a law of nature*." But how are the laws of nature known to us? By experience. What is the criterion, whereby we muft judge, whether the laws of nature are tranfgreffed? Solely the conformity or difconformity of events to our experience. This writer furely will not pretend, that we can have any knowledge *a priori*, either of the law, or of the violation.

Let us then examine by his own principles, whether the King of Siam, of whom the ftory he alludes to is related by Locke†, could have fufficient evidence, from testi-

* P. 182. in the note.

† Essay on Human Understanding, Book 4. chap. 15.

mony, of a fact so contrary to his experience, as the freezing of water. He could just say as much of this event, as the author can say of a dead man's being restored to life. "Such a thing was never observed, " as far as I could learn, in any age or country." If the things themselves too are impartially considered, and independently of the notions acquired by us in these northern climates, we should account the first at least as extraordinary as the second. That so pliant a body as water should become hard like pavement, so as to bear up an elephant on its surface, is as unlikely in itself, as that a body inanimate to-day, should be animated to-morrow. Nay, to the Indian monarch, I must think, that the first would appear more a miracle, more contrary to experience than the second. If he had been acquainted with *ice* or frozen water, and afterwards seen it become fluid, but had never seen nor learned, that after it was melted, it became hard again, the relation must have appeared marvellous, as the process from fluidity to hardness never had been experienced, though the reverse often had. But I believe nobody will question, that on this supposition it would not have appeared

quite so strange as it did. Yet this supposition makes the instance more parallel to the restoring of the dead to life. The process from animate to inanimate we are all acquainted with; and what is such a restoration, but the reversing of this process? So little reason had the author to insinuate, that the one was only *not conformable*, the other *contrary* to experience. If there be a difference in this respect, the first, to one alike unacquainted with both, must appear the more contrary of the two.

Does it alter the matter, that he calls the former "a fact which arose from a state of nature, with which the Indian was unacquainted?" Was not such a state quite unconformable, or (which in the author's language I have shown to be the same) contrary to his experience? Is then a state of nature which is contrary to experience, more credible than a single fact contrary to experience? I want the solution of one difficulty: The author, in order to satisfy me, presents me with a thousand others. Is this suitable to the method he proposes in another place, of admitting always the less miracle, and rejecting the greater*? Is it not,

* P. 182.

on the contrary, admitting without any difficulty the greater miracle, and thereby removing the difficulty, which he otherwise would have had in admitting the less? Does he forget, that to exhibit a state of nature entirely different from what we experience at present, is one of those enormous prodigies, which, in his account, render the Pentateuch unworthy of credit †? “No Indian,” says he in the note, “it is evident, “could have experience that water did not “freeze in cold climates. This is placing “nature in a situation quite unknown to “him, and it is impossible for him to tell *a priori*, what will result from it.” This is precisely, as if, in reply to the author’s objection from experience against the raising of a dead man (suppose Lazarus) to life, I should retort: “Neither you, Sir, nor any “who live in this century, can have experience, that a dead man could not be restored to life at the command of one divinely commissioned to give a revelation to men. This is placing nature in a situation quite unknown to you, and it is impossible for you to tell *a priori*, what will result from it. This, therefore, is not con-

“ trary to the course of nature, in cases
“ where all the circumstances are the same.
“ As you never saw one vested with such a
“ commission, you are as unexperienced, as
“ ignorant of this point, as the inhabitants
“ of Sumatra are of the frosts in Muscovy;
“ you cannot therefore reasonably, any more
“ than they, be positive as to the consequen-
“ ces.” Should he rejoin, as doubtless he
would, “ This is not taking away the diffi-
“ culty; but, like the elephant and the tor-
“ toise, in the account given by some bar-
“ barians of the manner in which the earth
“ is supported, it only shifts the difficulty a
“ step further back. My objection still re-
“ curs. That any man should be endowed
“ with such power, is contrary to experience,
“ and therefore incredible:” Should he, I
say, rejoin in this manner, I could only add,
“ Pray, Sir, revise your own words lately
“ quoted, and consider impartially whether
“ they be not as glaringly exposed to the
“ like reply.” For my part, I can only per-
ceive one difference that is material between
the two cases. You frankly confess, that
with regard to the freezing of water, besides
the absolute want of experience, there would
be from analogy a presumption against it,

which ought to weigh with a rational Indian. I think, on the contrary, in the case supposed by me, of one commissioned by Heaven, there is at least no presumption against the exertion of such a miraculous power. There is rather a presumption in its favour.

Does the author then say, that no testimony could give the King of Siam sufficient evidence of the effects of cold on water? No. By implication he says the contrary: "It required very strong testimony." Will he say, that those most astonishing effects of electricity lately discovered, so entirely unanalogous to every thing before experienced, will he say, that such facts no reasonable man could have sufficient evidence from testimony to believe? No. We may presume, he will not, from his decision in the former case; and if he should, the common sense of mankind would reclaim against his extravagance. Yet it is obvious to every considerate reader, that his argument concludes equally against those truly marvellous, as against miraculous events; both being alike unconformable, or alike contrary to former experience *.

* I cannot forbear to observe, that many of the principal terms employed in the essay, are used in a manner

THUS I think I have shown, that the author is chargeable with some fallacies, in his way of managing the argument ; that he all along avails himself of an ambiguity in the word *experience* ;——that his reasoning in-

extremely vague and unphilosophical. I have remarked the confusion I find in the application of the words, *experience*, *contrariety*, *conformity*. I might remark the same thing of the word, *miracle*. “ A miracle,” It is said, *p.* 182. *in the note*, “ may be accurately defined, “ A TRANSGRESSION of a law of nature, by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposul of some invisible agent.” The word *transgression* invariably denotes a criminal opposition to authority. The author’s accuracy in representing God as a transgressor, I have not indeed the perspicacity to discern. Does he intend, by throwing something monstrous into the definition, to infuse into the reader a prejudice against the thing defined ? But supposing that through inadvertency, he had used the term *transgression*, instead of *suspension*, which would have been both intelligible and proper ; one would at least expect, that the word *miracle* in the essay, always expressed the sense of the definition. But this it evidently does not. Thus in the instance of the miracle supposed (*p.* 203. *in the note*), he calls it, in the beginning of the paragraph, “ A violation of the usual course of nature ;” but in the end, after telling us that such a miracle, on the evidence supposed, “ our present philosophers ought to receive for certain,” he subjoins (how consistently, let the reader judge), and ought to search for the causes, whence it might

cludes a *petitio principii* in the bosom of it; —and that, in supporting his argument, he must have recourse to distinctions, where, even himself being judge, there is no difference.

“ be derived.” Thus it is insinuated, that though a fact apparently miraculous, and perfectly extraordinary, might be admitted by a philosopher, still the reality of the miracle must be denied. For if the interposal of the Deity be the proper solution of the phenomenon, why should we recur to natural causes? Hence a careless reader is insensibly led to think, that there is some special incredibility in such an interposal, distinct from its *uncommonness*. Yet the author’s great argument is built on this single circumstance, and places such an interposition just on the same footing with every event that is equally uncommon. At one time, he uses the word *miracle* to denote *bare improbability*, as will appear in the sixth section: at another, *absurd* and *miraculous* are with him, synonymous terms; so are also the *miraculous nature* of an event, and its *absolute impossibility*. Is this the style and manner of a reasoner?

SECT. III.

Mr. Hume himself gives up his favourite argument.

"MR. HUME himself," methinks I hear my reader repeating with astonishment, "gives up his favourite argument! To prove this point is indeed a very bold attempt." Yet that this attempt is not altogether so arduous as at first hearing, he will possibly imagine, I hope, if favoured a while with his attention, fully to convince him. If to acknowledge, after all, that there may be miracles which admit of proof from human testimony; if to acknowledge, that such miracles ought to be received, not as probable only, but as absolutely certain; or, in other words, that the proof from human testimony may be such, as that all the contrary uniform experience, should not only be overbalanced, but, to use the author's expression, should be annihilated; if such acknowledgments as these, are subversive of his own principles; if by making them, he abandons his darling argument; this strange part the essayist evidently acts.

"I own," these are his words, "there may possibly be miracles, or violations of

“ the usual course of nature, of such a kind
“ as to admit a proof from human testi-
“ mony, though perhaps” (in this he is mo-
“ dest enough, he avers nothing ; *perhaps*) “ it
“ will be impossible to find any such in all the
“ records of history.” To this declaration
he subjoins the following supposition : “ Sup-
“ pose all authors, in all languages, agree,
“ that from the 1st of January 1600, there
“ was a total darkness over the whole earth
“ for eight days ; suppose that the tradition
“ of this extraordinary event is still strong
“ and lively among the people ; that all tra-
“ vellers, who return from foreign countries,
“ bring us accounts of the same tradition,
“ without the least variation or contradic-
“ tion : it is evident, that our present philo-
“ sophers, instead of doubting of that fact,
“ ought to receive it for certain, and ought
“ to search for the causes whence it might be
“ derived *.”

Could one imagine, that the person who
had made the above acknowledgment, a per-
son too who is justly allowed by all who are
acquainted with his writings, to possess un-
common penetration and philosophical abi-
lities, that this were the same individual who

* P. 203. in the note.

had so short while before affirmed, that "a
 " miracle," or a violation of the usual course
 of nature, " supported by any human testi-
 " mony, is more properly a subject of deri-
 " sion than of argument * ;" who had in-
 sisted, that " it is not requisite, in order to
 " reject the fact, to be able accurately to
 " disprove the testimony, and to trace its
 " falsehood ; that such an evidence carries
 " falsehood on the very face of it † ;" that
 " we need but oppose even to a cloud of
 " witnesses, the absolute impossibility, or,"
 which is all one, " miraculous nature of the
 " events which they relate ; that this in the
 " eyes of all reasonable people will alone be
 " regarded as a sufficient refutation ‡ ;" and
 who, finally to put an end to all altercation
 on the subject, had pronounced this *oracle*.
 " NO TESTIMONY FOR ANY KIND OF
 " MIRACLE CAN EVER POSSIBLY AMOUNT TO
 " A PROBABILITY, MUCH LESS TO A PROOF ||."
 Was there ever a more glaring contradic-
 tion?

YET for the event supposed by the essayist,
 the testimony, in his judgment, would a-

* P. 194. † Ib. ‡ P. 196, &c. || P. 202.

mount to a *probability* ; nay to more than a probability, to a *proof* ; let not the reader be astonished, or if he cannot fail to be astonished, let him not be incredulous, when I add, to *more than a proof*, more than a full, entire, and direct proof ; for even this I hope to make evident from the author's principles and reasoning. " And even supposing," says he, that is, granting for argument's sake, " that the testimony for a miracle amounted " to a proof, it would be opposed by another proof, derived from the very nature " of the fact, which it would endeavour to " establish*." Here is then, by his own reasoning, proof against proof, from which there could result no belief or opinion, unless the one is conceived to be in some degree superior to the other. " Of which " proofs," says he, " the strongest must prevail, but still with a diminution of its force, " in proportion to that of its antagonist †." Before the author could believe such a miracle as he supposes, he must at least be satisfied, that the proof of it from testimony is stronger than the proof against it from experience. That we may form an accurate judgment of the strength he here ascribes to

* P. 202.

† P. 180.

testimony, let us consider what, by his own account, is the strength of the opposite proof from experience. "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as *entire*, as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined*." Again, "As an uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a *direct* and *full* proof, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle†." The proof then which the essayist admits from testimony, is, by his own estimate, not only superior to a *direct* and *full* proof; but even superior to as *entire* a proof, as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. Whence, I pray, doth testimony acquire such amazing evidence? "Testimony," says the author, "hath no evidence, but what it derives from experience. These differ from each other only as the species from the genus." Put then for *testimony*, the word *experience*, which in this case is equivalent, and the conclusion will run thus: *Here is a proof from experience, which is superior to as entire a proof from*

* P. 180.

† P. 181.

experience, as can possibly be imagined. This deduction from the author's words, the reader will perceive, is strictly logical. What the meaning of it is, I leave to Mr. Hume to explain.

What hath been above deduced, how much soever it be accounted, is not all that is implied in the concession made by the author. He further says, that the miraculous fact so attested, ought not only to be received, but to be received *for certain*. Is it not enough, Sir, that you have shown that your most full, most direct, most perfect argument may be overcome; will nothing satisfy you now but its destruction? One would imagine, that you had conjured up this demon, by whose irresistible arm you proposed to give a mortal blow to religion, and render scepticism triumphant, (that you had conjured him up, I say) for no other purpose, but to show with what facility you could lay him. To be serious, does not this author remember, that he had oftener than once laid it down as a maxim, That when there is proof against proof, we must incline to the superior, still with a diminution of assurance, in proportion to the force of its antagonist *?

* P. 178, 180.

But when a fact is received *for certain*, there can be no sensible diminution of assurance, such diminution always implying some doubt and *uncertainty*. Consequently the general proof from experience, though as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined, is not only surmounted, but is really in comparison as nothing, or, in Mr. Hume's phrase, undergoes annihilation, when balanced with the particular proof from testimony. Great indeed, it must be acknowledged, is the force of truth. This conclusion, on the principles I have been endeavouring to establish, has nothing in it, but what is conceivable and just; but on the principles of the essay, which deduce all the force of testimony from experience, serves only to confound the understanding, and to involve the subject in midnight darkness.

It is therefore manifest, that either this author's principles condemn his own method of judging, with regard to miraculous facts; or that his method of judging subverts his principles, and is a tacit desertion of them. Thus that impregnable fortress, the asylum of infidelity, which he so lately gloried in.

having erected, is in a moment abandoned by him, as a place untenable.

SECT. IV.

There is no peculiar presumption against such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion.

Is it then so, that the decisive argument, the essayist flattered himself he had discovered *, which with the wise and learned, was to prove an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and would consequently be useful as long as the world endures ; is it so, that this boasted argument hath in fact little or no influence on the discoverer himself ! But this author may well be excused. He cannot be always the metaphysician. He cannot soar incessantly in the clouds. Such constant elevation suits not the lot of humanity. He must sometimes, whether he will or not, descend to a level with other people, and fall into the humble track of common sense. One thing however he is resolved on: If he cannot by metaphysic spells silence the most arrogant bigotry and superstition ; he will at any rate, though for this purpose he

* P. 174.

should borrow aid from what he hath no liking to, trite and popular topics; he will at any rate free himself from their impertinent solicitations.

There are accordingly two principles in human nature, by which he accounts for all the relations, that have ever been in the world, concerning miracles. These principles are, the *passion for the marvellous*, and the *religious affection* *; against either of which singly, the philosopher, he says, ought ever to be on his guard; but incomparably more so, when both happen to be in strict confederacy together. “For if the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense; and human testimony in these circumstances loses all pretensions to authority †.” Notwithstanding this strong affirmation, there is reason to suspect that the author is not in his heart so great an enemy to the love of wonder as he affects to appear. No man can make a greater concession in favour of the wonderful, than he hath done in the passage quoted in the preceding section. No man was ever fonder of paradox, and, in theoretical subjects, of

* P. 184, 185.

† P. 185.

every notion that is remote from sentiments universally received. This love of paradoxes, he owns himself, that both his enemies and his friends reproach him with *. There must surely be some foundation for so universal a censure. If, therefore, in respect of the passion for the marvellous, he differ from other people, the difference ariseth from a particular delicacy in this gentleman, which makes him nauseate even to wonder with the crowd. He is of that singular turn that where every body is struck with astonishment, he can see nothing wondrous in the least; at the same time he discovers prodigies, where no soul but himself ever dreamt that there were any.

We may therefore rest assured of it, that the author might be conciliated to the *love of wonder*, provided the *spirit of religion* be kept at a distance, against which he hath unluckily contracted a mortal antipathy, against which he is resolved to wage eternal war. When he but touches this subject, he loseth at once his philosophic composure, and speaks with an acrimony unusual to him on other occasions. Something of this kind

* Dedication to the four dissertations.

appears from the citations already made. But if these should not satisfy, I shall produce one or two more, which certainly will. There is a second supposition the author makes, of a miraculous event, in a certain manner circumstanced and attested, which he declares, and I think with particular propriety. that he would "not have the least *inclination* to believe *." At his want of inclination, the reader will not be surpris'd, when he learns, that this supposed miracle is concerning a *resurrection*; an event which bears too strong a resemblance both to the doctrine and to the miracles of holy writ, not to alarm a modern Tyrrhonist. To the above declaration he subjoins, "But should
" this miracle be ascribed to any new system
" of religion, men in all ages have been so
" much imposed on by *ridiculous stories* of
" that kind, that this very circumstance
" would be a full proof of a cheat, and sufficient with all men of sense, not only to
" make them reject the fact, but even *reject it*
" *without further examination.*" Again, a little after, "As the violations of truth are
" more common in the testimony concerning religious miracles, than in that con-

* P. 204. in the note.

“cerning any other matter of fact,” (a point in which the author is positive, though he neither produceth facts nor arguments to support it) “this must diminish very much the authority of the former testimony, and” (pray observe his words) “*make us form a*”
“GENERAL RESOLUTION, *never to lend any at-*”
“*tention to it, with whatever specious pretext*”
“*it may be covered.*”

Never did the passion of an inflamed orator, or the intemperate zeal of a religionist, carry him further against his adversary than this man of speculation is carried by his prejudice against religion. Demagogues and bigots have often warned the people against listening to the arguments of an envied, and therefore detested, rival, lest by his sophistry they should be seduced into the most fatal errors. The same part this author, a philosopher, a sceptic, a dispassionate inquirer after truth, as surely he chooseth to be accounted, now acts in favour of infidelity. He thinks it not safe to give religion even a hearing. Nay, so strange a turn have matters taken of late with the managers of this controversy, that it is now the FREE-THINKER who preaches *implicit faith*; it is the INFIDEL, who warns us of the dan-

ger of consulting *reason*. Beware, says he, I admonish you, of inquiring into the strength of the plea, or of bringing it to the deceitful test of reason; for "those who will be so SILLY as to examine the affair by that medium, and seek particular flaws in the *testimony*, are almost sure to be confounded*." That religion is concerned in the matter, is reckoned by these sages sufficient evidence of imposture. The proofs she offers in her own defence, we are told by these candid judges, ought to be rejected, and *rejected without examination*. The old way of scrutiny and argument must now be laid aside, having been at length discovered to be but a bungling, a tedious, and a dangerous way at best. What then shall we substitute in its place? The essayist hath a most admirable expedient. A shorter and surer method he recommends to us, the expeditious way of *resolution*. "Form," says he "a GENERAL RESOLUTION, never to lend any attention to testimonies or facts urged by religion, with whatever specious pretext they may be covered."

I had almost congratulated Mr. Hume, and our enlightened age, on this happy in-

* P. 179. in the note.

vention, before I reflected, that though the application might be new, the expedient itself, of resolving to be deaf to argument, was very ancient, having been often with great success employed against atheists and heretics, and warmly recommended by Bellarmine and Scotus, and most others of that bright fraternity the schoolmen: Persons, I acknowledge, to whom one could not, perhaps in any other instance, find a resemblance in my ingenious opponent.

I am afraid, that after such a declaration, I must not presume to consider myself as arguing with the author, who hath in so peremptory a manner resolved to attend to nothing that can be said in opposition to his theory. "What judgment he has," to use his own expression, "he has renounced by principle, in these sublime and mysterious subjects *." If, however, it should prove the fate of these papers, the forbidding title of them notwithstanding, to be at any time honoured with the perusal of some infidel, not indeed so rivetted in unbelief as the essayist, I would earnestly entreat such reader, in the solemn style of Mr. Hume, "To lay his hand upon his heart, and after serious consideration

* P. 185.

“ declare *,” If any of the patrons of religion had acted this part, and warned people not to try by *argument* the metaphysical subtleties of the adversaries, affirming, that “ they
“ who were MAD enough to examine the affair by that medium, and seek particular
“ flaws in the *reasoning*, were almost sure to
“ be confounded ; that the only prudent
“ method was, to form a GENERAL RESOLUTION, never to lend any attention to what
“ was advanced on the opposite side, *however*
“ *ever specious* ;” whether this conduct would not have afforded great matter of triumph to those gentlemen the deists ; whether it would not have been construed by them, and even justly, into a tacit conviction of the weakness of our cause, which we were afraid of exposing in the light, and bringing to a fair trial. But we scorn to take shelter in obscurity, and meanly to decline the combat ; confident as we are, that REASON is our ally and our friend, and glad to find that the enemy at length so violently suspects her.

As to the first method, by which the author accounts for the fabulous relations of monsters and prodigies, it is freely acknow-

* P. 206.

ledged, that the Creator hath implanted in human nature, as a spur to the improvement of the understanding, a principle of *curiosity*, which makes the mind feel a particular pleasure in every new acquisition of knowledge. It is acknowledged also, that as every principle in our nature is liable to abuse, so this principle will often give the mind a bias to the marvellous, for the more marvellous any thing is, that is, the more unlike to all that hath formerly been known, the more new it is; and this bias, in many instances, may induce belief on insufficient evidence.

But the presumption that hence ariseth against the marvellous is not stronger in the case of miracles (as will appear from an attentive perusal of the second section) than in the case of every fact that is perfectly extraordinary. Yet how easily this obstacle may be overcome by testimony, might be illustrated, if necessary, in almost every branch of science, in physiology, in geography, in history. On the contrary, what an immense impediment would this presumption prove to the progress of philosophy and letters, had it in reality one fiftieth part of the strength, which the author seems to attribute to it. I shall not tire my reader or myself by recur-

ring to the philosophic wonders in electricity, chemistry, magnetism, which, all the world sees, may be fully proved to us by testimony, before we make the experiments ourselves.

BUT there is, it seems, additional to this, a peculiar presumption against religious miracles. "The wise," as the author hath observed with reason, "lend a very academic faith to every report, which favours the passion of the reporter, whether it magnifies his country, his family, or himself, or in any other way strikes in with his natural inclinations and propensities *." Now, as no object whatever operates more powerfully on the fancy than *religion* does, or works up the passions to a higher fervour; so, in matters relating to this subject, if in any subject, we have reason to suspect that the understanding will prove a dupe to the passions. On this point, therefore, we ought to be peculiarly cautious, that we be not hasty of belief. In this sentiment we all agree.

But there is one circumstance, which he hath overlooked, and which is nevertheless of the greatest consequence in the debate. It is this, that the prejudice resulting from the re-

* P. 200.

ligious affection, may just as readily *obstruct*, as *promote* our faith in a religious miracle. What things in nature are more contrary, than one religion is to another religion? They are just as contrary as light and darkness, truth and error. The affections with which they are contemplated by the same person, are just as opposite, as desire and aversion, love and hatred. The same religious zeal which gives the mind of a Christian, a *propensity* to the belief of a miracle in support of Christianity, will inspire him with an *aversion* from the belief of a miracle in support of Mahometism. The same principle, which will make him acquiesce in evidence *less* than sufficient in the one case, will make him require evidence *more* than sufficient in the other.

Before then the remark of the author can be of any use in directing our judgment, as to the evidence of miracles attested, we must consider whether the original tenets of the witnesses would naturally have biased their minds in *favour* of the miracles, or in *opposition* to them. If the former was the case, the testimony is so much the *less* to be regarded; if the latter, so much the *more*. Will it satisfy on this head to acquaint us,

that the prejudices of the witnesses must have favoured the miracles, since they were zealous promoters of the doctrine, in support of which those miracles are said to have been performed? To answer thus would be to misunderstand the point. The question is, Was this doctrine the faith of the witnesses, before they saw, or fancied they saw the miracles? If it was, I agree with him. Great, very great allowance must be made for the prejudices of education, for principles, early perhaps, carefully, and deeply rooted in their minds, and for the religious affection founded in these principles; which allowance must always derogate from the weight of their testimony. But if the faith of the witnesses stood originally in opposition to the doctrine attested by the miracles; if the only account that can be given of their conversion, is the conviction which the miracles produced in them; it must be a preposterous way of arguing, to derive their conviction from a religious zeal, which would at first obstinately withstand, and for some time hinder such conviction. On the contrary, that the evidence arising from miracles performed in proof of a doctrine disbelieved, and consequently hated before, did in fact surmount

that obstacle, and conquer all the opposition arising thence, is a very strong presumption in favour of that evidence: just as strong a presumption in its favour, as it would have been against it, had all their former zeal, and principles, and prejudices, co-operated with the evidence, whatever it was, in gaining an entire assent.

Hence there is the greatest disparity in this respect, a disparity which deserves to be particularly attended to, betwixt the evidence of miracles performed in proof of a religion *to be* established, and in *contradiction* to opinions generally received; and the evidence of miracles performed in support of a religion *already* established, and in *confirmation* of opinions generally received. Hence also the greatest disparity betwixt the miracles recorded by the evangelists, and those related by Mariana, Bede, or any monkish historian.

THERE is then no peculiar presumption against religious miracles merely as such; if in certain circumstances there is a presumption against them, the presumption ariseth solely from the circumstances, insomuch that,

in the opposite circumstances, it is as strongly in their favour.

SECT. V.

There is a peculiar presumption in favour of such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion.

IN this section I propose to consider the reverse of the question treated in the former. In the former I proved that there is no peculiar presumption against religious miracles; I now inquire whether there be any in their favour. The question is important, and intimately connected with the subject.

THE boldest infidel will not deny, that the immortality of the soul, a future and eternal state, and the connection of our happiness or misery in that state, with our present good or bad conduct, not to mention the doctrines concerning the divine unity and perfections, are tenets which carry no absurdity in them. They may be true for aught he knows. He disbelieves them, not because they are incredible in themselves, but because he hath not evidence of their truth. He pretends not to disprove them, nor does he think the task incumbent on him. He only pleads,

that before he can yield them his assent, they must be proved.

Now, as whatever is possible, may be supposed, let us suppose that the dogmas above mentioned are all infallible truths ; and let the unbeliever say, whether he can conceive an object worthier of the divine interposal, than to reveal these truths to mankind ; and to enforce them in such a manner, as may give them a suitable influence on the heart and life. Of all the inhabitants of the earth, man is incomparably the noblest. Whatever, therefore, regards the interest of the human species, is a grander concern, than what regards either the inanimate or the brute creation. If man was made, as is doubtless not impossible, for an after state of immortality ; whatever relates to that immortal state, or may conduce to prepare him for the fruition of it, must be immensely superior to that which concerns merely the transient enjoyments of the present life. How sublime then is the object which religion, and religion only, exhibits as the ground of supernatural interpositions ! This object is no other than the interest of man, a reasonable and moral agent, the only being in this lower world which bears in his soul the image of his maker ; not the interest

of an individual, but of the kind ; not for a limited duration, but for eternity : an object, at least in one respect, adequate to the majesty of God.

Does this appear to the essayist too much like arguing *a priori*, of which I know he hath a detestation? It is just such an argument, as, presupposing the most rational principles of Deism, results from those maxims concerning intelligent causes, and their operations, which are founded in general experience, and which uniformly lead us to expect, that the end will be proportionate to the means. The *Pagans* of Rome had notions of their divinities infinitely inferior to the opinions concerning God, which in Christian countries are maintained even by those, who, for distinction's sake, are called DEISTS. Yet such of the former as had any justness of taste, were offended with those poets, who exhibited the celestials on slight occasions, and for trivial purposes, interfering in the affairs of men. Why? Because such an exhibition shocked all the principles of probability. It had not that verisimilitude which is absolutely necessary to render fiction agreeable. Accordingly it is a precept, with relation to the machinery of the

drama, given by one who was both a critic and a poet, *That a god must never be introduced, unless to accomplish some important design, which could not be otherwise effectuated* *. The foundation of this rule, which is that of my argument, is therefore one of those indisputable principles, which are found every where, among the earliest results of experience.

THUS it appears, that from the dignity of the end, there ariseth a peculiar presumption in favour of such miracles as are said to have been wrought in support of religion.

SECT. VI.

Inquiry into the meaning and propriety of one of Mr. Hume's favourite maxims.

THERE is a method truly curious, suggested by the author, for extricating the mind, should the evidence from testimony be so great, that its falsehood might, as he terms it, be accounted miraculous. In this puzzling case, when a man is so beset with miracles, that he is under a necessity of admitting one, he must always take care it be the smallest; for it is an *axiom* in this writer's DIALECTIC, *That the probability of the fact is*

* Nec deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit.

HORAT.

in the inverse ratio of the quantity of miracle there is in it. “ I weigh,” says he, “ the
 “ one miracle against the other, and accord-
 “ ing to the superiority which I discover, I
 “ pronounce my decision, and always reject
 “ the greater miracle *.”

Now, of this method, which will no doubt be thought by many to be very ingenious, and which appears to the essayist both very momentous and very perspicuous, I own I am not able to discover either the reasonableness or the use.

First, I cannot see the reasonableness. “ A
 “ miracle,” to adopt his own definition,
 “ implies the transgression,” or rather the
 suspension, “ of some law of nature ; and
 “ that either by a particular volition of the
 “ Deity, or by the interposal of some invisi-
 “ ble agent †.” Now, as I should think,
 from the principles laid down in the preced-
 ing section, that it would be for no trifling
 purpose, that the laws of nature would be
 suspended, and either the Deity or an invi-
 sible agent would interpose ; it is on the
 same principles, natural to imagine, that the
 means, or miracle performed, should bear a

* P. 182.

† Ib. in the note.

proportion, in respect of dignity and greatness, to the end proposed. Were I therefore under such a necessity as is supposed by Mr. Hume, of admitting the truth of a miracle, I acknowledge, that of two contradictory miracles, where all other circumstances are equal, I should think it reasonable to believe the greater. I shall borrow an illustration from the author himself. "A miracle," he says, "may either be *discoverable* by men or not. This alters not its nature and essence. The raising of a house or ship into the air is a visible miracle; the raising of a feather, when the wind wants *ever so little* of a force requisite for that purpose, is as real a miracle, though not so *sensible* with regard to us*." Surely if any miracle may be called *little*, the last mentioned is entitled to that denomination, not only because it is an *undiscoverable* and *insensible* miracle, but because the quantum of miraculous force requisite, is, by the hypothesis, *ever so little*, or the least conceivable. Yet, if it were certain, that God, angel, or spirit, were, for one of those purposes, to interpose in suspending the laws of nature; I believe most men would join with me in

* P. 182. in the note.

thinking, that it would be rather for the raising of a *house* or *ship*, than for the raising of a *feather*.

But though the maxim laid down by the author were just, I cannot discover in what instance, or by what application, it can be rendered of any utility. Why? Because we have no rule whereby we can judge of the greatness of miracles. I allow, that in such a singular instance, as that above quoted from the essay, we may judge safely enough. But that can be of no practical use. In almost every case that will occur, I may warrantably aver, that it will be impossible for the acutest intellect to decide, which of two is the greater miracle. As to the author, I cannot find that he has favoured us with any light, in so important and so critical a question. Have we not then some reason to dread, that the task will not be less difficult to furnish us with a *measure*, by which we can determine the magnitude of miracles; than to provide us with a *balance*, by which we can ascertain the comparative weight of testimonies and experiences?

If, leaving the speculations of the essayist, we shall, in order to be assisted on this subject, recur to his example and decisions; let

us consider the miracle which was recited in the third section, and which he declares, would, on the evidence of such testimony as he supposes, not only be probable but certain. For my part, it is not in my power to conceive a greater miracle than that is. The whole universe is affected by it; the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars. The most invariable laws of nature with which we are acquainted, even those which regulate the motions of the heavenly bodies, and dispense darkness and light to worlds, are violated. I appeal to the author himself, whether it could be called a greater, or even so great a miracle, that all the writers at that time, or even all mankind, had been seized with a new species of epidemical delirium, which had given rise to this strange illusion. But in this the author is remarkably unfortunate, that the principles by which he in fact regulates his judgment and belief, are often the reverse of those which he endeavours to establish in his theory.

SHALL I hazard a conjecture? It is, that the word *miracle*, as thus used by the author, is used in a vague and improper sense, as a synonymous term for *improbable*; and that

believing the *less*, and rejecting the *greater* miracle, denote simply believing what is *least*, and rejecting what is *most improbable*; or still more explicitly, believing what we think *most worthy of belief*, and rejecting what we think *least worthy*. I am aware, on a second perusal of the author's words, that my talent in guessing may be justly questioned. He hath in effect told us himself what he means. "When any one," says he, "tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more *probable*, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact he relates should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion *." At first indeed one is ready to exclaim, What a strange *revolution* is here! The belief of miracles then, even by Mr. Hume's account, is absolutely

* P. 182.

inevitable. Miracles themselves, too, so far from being impossible, or even extraordinary, are the commonest things in nature ; so common, that when any miraculous fact is attested to us, we are equally under a necessity of believing a miracle, whether we believe the fact, or deny it. The whole difference between the essayist and us, is at length reduced to this single point, Whether greater or smaller miracles are entitled to the preference. This mystery however vanishes on a nearer inspection. The style, we find, is figurative, and the author is all the while amusing both his readers and himself with an unusual application of a familiar term. What is called the weighing of *probabilities* in one sentence, is the weighing of *miracles* in the next. If it were asked, For what reason did not Mr. Hume express his sentiment in ordinary and proper words ? I could only answer, I know no reason but one, and that is, To give the appearance of novelty and depth to one of those very harmless propositions, which by philosophers are called *identical*, and which, to say the truth, need some disguise, to make them pass upon the world with tolerable decency.

What then shall be said of the conclusion

which he gives as the sum and quintessence of the first part of the essay? The best thing, for aught I know, that can be said, is, that it contains a most certain truth, though at the same time the least significant, that ever perhaps was ushered into the world with so much solemnity. In order, therefore, to make *plainer English* of his *plain consequence*, let us only change the word *miraculous*, as applied to the falsehood of human testimony, into *improbable*, which in this passage is entirely equivalent, and observe the effect produced by this elucidation. "The plain consequence is, and it is a GENERAL MAXIM, " *worthy of our attention*, THAT NO TESTIMONY " IS SUFFICIENT TO ESTABLISH A MIRACLE; " UNLESS THE TESTIMONY BE OF SUCH A KIND, " THAT ITS FALSEHOOD WOULD BE MORE IM- " PROBABLE THAN THE FACT WHICH IT " ENDEAVOURS TO ESTABLISH *." If the reader thinks himself instructed by this discovery, I should be loth to envy him the pleasure he may derive from it.

A
DISSERTATION
ON
M I R A C L E S.

PART II.

The miracles on which the belief of Christianity is founded, are sufficiently attested.

SECT. I.

There is no presumption, arising from human nature, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity.

FROM what hath been evinced in the fourth and fifth sections of the former part, with regard to religion in general, *two corollaries* are clearly deducible in favour of Christianity. *One* is, That the presumption arising from the dignity of the end, to say the least of it, can in no religion be pleaded with greater advantage than in the Christian. *The other* is, That the presumption arising from the religious affection, instead of weakening, corroborates

the evidence of the gospel. The faith of Jesus was promulgated, and gained ground, not with the assistance, but in defiance, of all the religious zeal and prejudices of the times.

IN order to invalidate the *second* corollary, it will possibly be urged, that profelytes to a new religion, may be gained at first; either by address and eloquence, or by the appearances of uncommon sanctity, and rapturous fervours of devotion; that if once people have commenced profelytes, the transition to enthusiasm is almost unavoidable; and that enthusiasm will fully account for the utmost pitch both of credulity and falseness.

Admitting that a few converts might be made by the afore said arts, it is subversive of all the laws of probability, to imagine, that the strongest prepossessions, fortified with that vehement abhorrence which contradiction in religious principles rarely fails to excite, should be so easily vanquished in multitudes. Besides, the very pretext of supporting the doctrine by miracles, if a false pretext, would of necessity do unspeakable hurt to the cause. The pretence of miracles will quickly attract the attention of all to whom the new doctrine is published. The influence which ad-

dress and eloquence, appearances of sanctity and fervours of devotion, would otherwise have had, however great, will be superseded by the consideration of what is infinitely more striking and decisive. The miracles will therefore first be canvassed, and canvassed with a temper of mind the most unfavourable to conviction. It is not solely on the testimony of the evangelists that Christians believe the gospel, though that testimony appears in all respects such as merits the highest regard; but it is on the success of the gospel; it is on the testimony, as we may justly call it, of the numberless proselytes that were daily made to a religion, opposing all the religious professions then in the world, and appealing, for the satisfaction of every body, to the visible and miraculous interposition of Heaven in its favour. The witnesses considered in this light, and in this light they ought to be considered, will be found more than "a sufficient number:" and though perhaps there were few of them, what the author would denominate "men of education and learning;" yet, which is more essential, they were generally men of good sense, and knowledge enough to secure them against all delusion, as to those plain

facts for which they gave their testimony ; men who (in the common acceptation of the words) neither did, nor could derive to themselves either interest or honour by their attestations, but did thereby, on the contrary, evidently abandon all hopes of both.

It deserves also to be remembered, that there is here no contradictory testimony, notwithstanding that both the founder of our religion and his adherents were from the first surrounded by inveterate enemies, who never "esteemed the matter too inconsiderable " to deserve their attention or regard ;" and who, as they could not want the means, gave evident proofs that they wanted not the inclination to detect the fraud, if there had been any fraud to be detected. They were jealous of their own reputation and authority, and foresaw but too clearly, that the success of Jesus would give a fatal blow to both. As to the testimonies themselves, we may permit the author to try them by his own rules *. There is here no opposition of testimony ; there is no apparent ground of suspicion from the character of the witnesses ; there is no interest which they could have in imposing on the world ; there is not a small

* P. 178.

number of witnesses, they are innumerable. Do the historians of our Lord deliver their testimony with doubt and hesitation? Do they fall into the opposite extreme of using too violent asseverations? So far from both, that the most amazing instances of divine power, and the most interesting events, are related without any censure or reflection of the writers, on persons, parties, actions, or opinions; with such an unparalleled and unaffected simplicity, as demonstrates, that they were neither themselves animated by passion like enthusiasts, nor had any design of working on the passions of their readers. The greatest miracles are recorded, with as little appearance either of doubt or wonder in the writer, and with as little suspicion of the reader's incredulity, as the most ordinary incidents: A manner as unlike that of impostors as of enthusiasts; a manner in which those writers are altogether singular; and I will add, a manner which can on no supposition be tolerably accounted for, but that of the truth, and not of the truth only, but of the notoriety, of the events which they related. They spoke like people, who had themselves been long familiarized to such acts of omnipotence and grace. They spoke like

people, who knew, that many of the most marvellous actions they related, had been so publicly performed, and in the presence of multitudes alive at the time of their writing, as to be uncontrovertible, and as in fact not to have been controverted, even by their bitterest foes. They could boldly appeal on this head to their enemies. *A man, say they, speaking of their Master *, approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as YE YOURSELVES ALSO KNOW.* The objections of Christ's persecutors against his doctrine, those objections also which regard the nature of his miracles, are, together with his answers, faithfully recorded by the sacred historians; it is strange, if the occasion had been given, that we have not the remotest hint of any objections against the reality of his miracles, and a confutation of those objections.

BUT passing the manner in which the first proselytes may be gained to a new religion, and supposing some actually gained, no matter how, to the faith of Jesus; can it be easily accounted for, that, even with the help of those early converts, this religion

* Acts ii. 22.

should have been propagated in the world, on the *false* pretence of miracles? Nothing more easily, says the author. Those original propagators of the gospel have been deceived themselves; for "a religionist may be "an *enthusiast*, and imagine he sees what has "no reality *."

Were this admitted, it would not, in the present case, remove the difficulty. He must not only himself imagine he sees what has no reality; he must make every body present, those who are no enthusiasts, nor even friends, nay he must make enemies also, imagine they see the same thing which he imagines he sees; for the miracles of Jesus were acknowledged by those who persecuted him.

That an *enthusiast* is very liable to be imposed on, in whatever favours the particular species of enthusiasm, with which he is affected, none who knows any thing of the human heart will deny. But still this frailty hath its limits. For my own part, I cannot find examples of any, even among enthusiasts (unless to the conviction of every body they were distracted), who did not see and hear in the same manner as other people. Many of this tribe have mistaken the re-

* P. 185.

series of a heated imagination, for the communications of the Divine Spirit, who never, in one single instance, mistook the operations of their external senses. Without marking this difference, we should make no distinction between the *enthusiastic* character and the *frantic*, which are in themselves evidently distinct. How shall we then account from *enthusiasm*, for the testimony given by the apostles, concerning the resurrection of their Master, and his ascension into heaven, not to mention innumerable other facts? In these it was impossible that any, who in the use of their reason were but one remove from *Bedlamites*, should have been deceived. Yet, in the present case, the unbeliever must even say more than this, and, accumulating absurdity upon absurdity, must affirm, that the apostles were deceived as to the resurrection and ascension of their Master, notwithstanding that they themselves had concerted the plan of stealing his body, and concealing it.

BUT this is not the only resource of the infidel. If he is driven from this strong hold, he can take refuge in another. Admit the apostles were not deceived themselves, they may nevertheless have been, through mere

devotion and benevolence, incited to deceive the rest of mankind. The religionist, rejoins the author, " may know his narration to be " false, and yet persevere in it, with the best " intentions in the world, for the sake of promoting so holy a cause *."

Our religion, to use its own nervous language, teacheth us †, that we ought not to lie, or *speake wickedly*, not even *for God* ; that we ought not to *accept his person* in judgment, or *talk*, or *act deceitfully for him*. But so very little, it must be owned, has this sentiment been attended to, even in the Christian world, that one would almost think, it contained a strain of virtue too sublime for the apprehension of the multitude. It is therefore a fact not to be questioned, that little pious frauds, as they are absurdly, not to say impiously called, have been often practised by ignorant zealots, in support of a cause, which they firmly believed to be both true and holy. But in all such cases the truth and holiness of the cause are wholly independent of those artifices. A person may be persuaded of the former, who is too clear-sighted to be deceived by the latter : for even a full conviction of the truth of the cause is not, in the least, in-

* P. 185.

† Job xiii. 7, 8.

consistent with either the consciousness, or the detection of the frauds used in support of it. In the Romish church, for example, there are many zealous and orthodox believers, who are nevertheless incapable of being imposed on by the lying wonders, which some of their clergy have exhibited. The circumstances of the apostles were widely different from the circumstances either of those believers or of their clergy. Some of the miraculous events which the apostle's attested, were not only the *evidences*, but the distinguishing *doctrines* of the religion which they taught. There is, therefore, in their case, an absolute inconsistency betwixt a conviction of the truth of the cause, and the consciousness of the frauds used in support of it. Those frauds themselves, if I may so express myself, constituted the very essence of the cause. What were the tenets, by which they were distinguished, in their religious system, particularly from the Pharisees, who owned not only the unity and perfections of the Godhead, the existence of angels and demons, but the general resurrection, and a future state of rewards and punishments? Were not these their peculiar tenets, That "Jesus, whom the Jews and

“ Romans joined in crucifying without the
 “ gates of Jerusalem, had suffered that ig-
 “ nominiuous death, to make atonement for
 “ the sins of men*? that, in testimony of
 “ this, and of the divine acceptance, God
 “ had raised him from the dead? that he
 “ had exalted him to his own right hand,
 “ to be a prince and a saviour, to give re-
 “ pentance to the people, and the remission
 “ of their sins†? that he is now our advo-
 “ cate with the Father‡? that he will de-
 “ scend from heaven at the last day, to
 “ judge the world in righteousness§, and to
 “ receive his faithful disciples into heaven,
 “ to be forever with himself||?” These fun-
 damental articles of their system, they must
 have known, deserved no better appellation
 than a string of lies, if we suppose them liars
 in the testimony they gave of the resurrec-
 tion, and ascension of their master. If, a-
 greeably to the Jewish hypothesis, they had,
 in a most wonderful and daring manner,
 stole by night the corpse from the sepulchre,
 that on the false report of his resurrection,
 they might found the stupendous fabric they

* Rom. v. 6. &c. † Acts ii. 32. &c. v. 30. &c.
 x. 40. &c. ‡ 1 Jo. ii. 1. § Acts x. 42. xvii. 31.
 || Jo. xiv. 3.

had projected among themselves, how was it possible they should conceive the cause to be either true or holy? They must have known, that in those cardinal points, on which all depends, they were false witnesses concerning God, wilful corrupters of the religion of their country, and public, though indeed disinterested incendiaries, whithersoever they went. They could not therefore enjoy even that poor solace, "that the end will sanctify the means;" a solace with which the monk or anchoret silences the remonstrances of his conscience, when, in defence of a religion which he regards as certain, he, by some pitiful juggler-trick, imposeth on the credulity of the rabble. On the contrary, the whole scheme of the apostles must have been, and not only must have been, but must have appeared to themselves, a most audacious freedom with their Maker, a villainous imposition on the world, and I will add, a most foolish and ridiculous project of heaping ruin and disgrace upon themselves, without the prospect of any compensation in the present life, or reversion in the future.

ONCE more, can we account for so extra-

ordinary a phenomenon, by attributing it to that most powerful of all motives, as the author thinks it*, “an ambition to attain
“so sublime a character, as that of a missionary, a prophet, an ambassador from
“heaven?”

Not to mention, that such a towering ambition was but ill adapted to the mean rank, poor education, and habitual circumstances, of such men as the apostles mostly had been; a desire of that kind, whatever wonders it may effectuate, when supported by enthusiasm, and faith, and zeal, must have soon been crushed by the outward, and to human appearance insurmountable difficulties and distresses they had to encounter; when quite unsupported from within, by either faith or hope, or the testimony of a good conscience; rather, I should have said, when they themselves were haunted from within by a consciousness of the blackest guilt, impiety, and baseness. Strange, indeed, it must be owned, without a parallel, that in such a cause, and in such circumstances, not only one, but all, should have the resolution to persevere to the last, in spite of infamy and torture; and that no one among so many confederates,

* P. 200.

should be induced to betray the dreadful secret.

Thus it appears, that no *address* in the FOUNDER of our religion, that no *enthusiastic credulity*, no *pious frauds*, no *ambitious views*, in the FIRST CONVERTS, will account for its propagation on the plea of miracles, if false; and that consequently there is no presumption arising from *human nature* against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity.

SECT. II.

There is no presumption arising from the history of mankind, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of Christianity.

IN the foregoing section, I reasoned only from the knowledge that experience affords us of *human nature*, and of the motives by which men are influenced in their conduct. I come now to the examination of facts, that I may know whether the *history of mankind* will invalidate or corroborate my reasonings.

THE essayist is confident, that all the evi-

dence resulting hence is on his side. Nay, so unquestionable a truth does this appear to him, that he never attempts to prove it : he always presupposeth it, as a point universally acknowledged. “ Men in all ages,” we learn from a passage already quoted, “ have been much imposed on, by ridiculous stories of miracles ascribed to new systems of religion *.” Again he asserts, that “ the violations of truth are more common in the testimony concerning religious miracles, than in that concerning any other matter of fact †.” These assertions, however, though used for the same purpose, the attentive reader will observe, are far from conveying the same sense, or being of equal weight in the argument. The difference hath been marked in the fourth section of the first part of this tract. The oracular predictions among the ancient Pagans, and the pretended wonders performed by capuchins and friars, by itinerant or stationary teachers among the Roman Catholics, the author will doubtless reckon among religious miracles ; but he can with no propriety denominate them, miracles ascribed

* P. 204, in the note. † P. 205, in the note.

to a new system of religion †. Now it is with those of the class last mentioned, and with those only, that I am concerned ; for

† Should the author insist, that such miracles are nevertheless meant to establish, if not a new system, at least some *new point* of religion ; that those which are wrought in Spain, for example, are not intended as proofs of the gospel, but as proofs of the efficacy of a particular *crucifix*, or *relic* ; which is always a new point, or at least not universally received : I must beg the reader will consider, what is the meaning of this expression, *a new point of religion*. It is not *a new system*, it is not *even a new doctrine*. We know, that one article of faith in the church of Rome is, that the images and relics of saints ought to be worshipped. We know also, that in proof of this article, it is one of their principal arguments, that miracles are wrought by means of such relics and images. We know further, that that church never attempted to enumerate her relics and other trumpery, and thus to ascertain the individual objects of the adoration of her votaries. The producing therefore a *new relic*, *image*, or *crucifix*, as an object of worship, implies not the smallest *deviation* from the *faith established* ; at the same time the opinion, that *miracles* are performed by means of such relic, image, or crucifix, proves, in the minds of the people, for the reason assigned, a very strong *confirmation* of the *faith established*. All such miracles, therefore, must be considered as wrought in support of the received superstition, and accordingly are always favoured by the popular prejudices.

it is only to them that the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity bear any analogy.

I shall then examine impartially this bold assertion, That "men in all ages have been much imposed on, by ridiculous stories of miracles ascribed to new systems of religion." For my part, I am fully satisfied, that there is not the shadow of truth in it: and I am utterly at a loss to conceive what could induce an author so well versed in the annals both of ancient and modern times as Mr. Hume, in such a positive manner to advance it. I believe it will require no elaborate disquisition to evince, that these two, JUDAISM and CHRISTIANITY, are of all that have subsisted, or now subsist in the world, the only religions, which claim to have been attended in their first publication with the evidence of *miracles*. It deserves also to be remarked, that it is more in conformity to common language, and incidental distinctions which have arisen, than to strict propriety, that I call Judaism and Christianity, two religions. It is true, the Jewish creed, in the days of our Saviour, having been corrupted by rabbinical traditions, stood in many respects, and at this day stands, in direct opposition to the gospel.

But it is not in this acceptation that I use the word Judaism. Such a creed, I am sensible, we can no more denominate the doctrine of the *Old Testament*, than we can denominate the creed of Pope Pius the doctrine of the *New*. And truly the fate which both institutions, that of *Moses* and that of *Christ*, have met with among men, hath been in many respects extremely similar. But when, on the contrary, we consider the religion of the Jews, not as the system of faith and practice, which presently obtains, or heretofore hath obtained among that people; but solely as the religion that is revealed in *the law and the prophets*, we must acknowledge, that in this institution are contained the rudiments of the gospel. The same great plan carried on by the Divine Providence, for the recovery and final happiness of mankind, is the subject of both dispensations. They are by consequence closely connected. In the former we are acquainted with the *occasion and rise*, in the latter more fully with the *progress and completion* of this benign scheme. It is for this reason that the scriptures of the *Old Testament*, which alone contain the authentic religion of the SYNAGOGUE, have ever been ac-

knowledge in the CHURCH, an essential part of the *gospel-revelation*. The apostles and evangelists, in every part of their writings, presuppose the truth of the Mosaic economy, and often found both their doctrine and arguments upon it. It is therefore, I affirm, only in proof of this one series of revelations, that the aid of miracles hath with success been pretended to.

CAN the PAGAN religion, can, I should rather say, any of the numberless religions (for they are totally distinct) known by the common name of *Pagan*, produce any claim of this kind that will merit our attention? If the author knows of any, I wish he had mentioned it; for in all antiquity, as far as my acquaintance with it reacheth, I can recollect no such claim. However, that I may not, on the one hand, appear to pass the matter too slightly, or, on the other, lose myself, as Mr. Hume expresses it, in too wide a field; I shall briefly consider, whether the ancient religions of *Greece* or *Rome* (which of all the species of Heathenish superstition are on many accounts the most remarkable) can present a claim of this nature. Will it be said, that that monstrous

heap of fables we find in ancient bards, relating to the genealogy, production, amours and achievements of the gods, are the miracles on which Greek and Roman Paganism claims to be founded?

If one should talk in this manner, I must remind him, *first*, that these are by no means exhibited as EVIDENCES, but as the THEOLOGY itself; the poets always using the same affirmative style concerning what passed in heaven, in hell, and in the ocean, where men could not be spectators, as concerning what passed upon earth; *secondly*, that all those mythological tales are confessedly recorded many centuries after they are supposed to have happened; no voucher, no testimony, nothing that can deserve the name of evidence having been produced, or even alleged, in proof of them; *thirdly*, that the intention of the writers seems to be solely the amusement, not the conviction of their readers; that accordingly no writer scruples to model the mythology to his particular taste, or rather caprice; but considering this as a province subject to the laws of Parnassus, all agree in arrogating here the immemorial privilege of poets, to say and feign, unquestioned, what they please; and, *fourthly*, that

at least several of their narrations are allegorical, and as plainly intended to convey some physical or moral instruction, as any of the apologues of *Æsop*. But to have said even thus much in refutation of so absurd a plea, will perhaps to many readers appear superfluous.

LEAVING, therefore, the endless absurdities and incoherent fictions of idolaters, I shall inquire, in the next place, whether the MAHOMETAN worship (which in its speculative principles appears more rational) pretends to have been built on the evidence of miracles.

Mahomet, the founder of this profession, openly and frequently, as all the world knows, disclaimed such evidence. He frankly owned, that he had no commission nor power to work miracles, being sent of God to the people only as a preacher. Not indeed but that there are things mentioned in the revelation he pretended to give them, which, if true, would have been miraculous; such are the nocturnal visits of the angel Gabriel (not unlike those secret interviews, which Numa, the institutor of the Roman rites, affirmed that he had with the goddess Ege-

ria), his getting from time to time parcels of the uncreated book transmitted to him from heaven, and his most amazing night-journey. But these miracles could be no evidences of his mission. Why? Because no person was witness to them. On the contrary, it was because his adherents had previously and implicitly believed his apostleship, that they admitted things so incredible, on his bare declaration. There is indeed one miracle, and but one, which he often urgeth against the infidels, as the main support of his cause; a miracle, for which even we, in this distant region and period, have not only the evidence of testimony, but, if we please to use it, all the evidence which the contemporaries and countrymen of this military apostle ever enjoyed. The miracle I mean is the manifest divinity, or supernatural excellence, of the scriptures which he gave them; a miracle, concerning which I shall only say, that as it falls not under the cognizance of the senses, but of a much more fallible tribunal, taste in composition, and critical discernment, so a principle of less efficacy than enthusiasm, even the slightest partiality, may make a man, in this particular, imagine he perceives

what hath no reality. Certain it is, that notwithstanding the many defiances, which the prophet gave his enemies, sometimes to produce ten chapters, sometimes one, that could bear to be compared with an equal portion of the perspicuous book *, they seem not in the least to have been convinced, that there was any thing miraculous in the matter. Nay, this sublime performance, so highly venerated by every Mussulman, they were not afraid to blaspheme as contemptible, calling it, “A confused heap of dreams,” and “the silly fables of ancient times †.”

* Alcoran. The chapter—of the cow,—of Jonas,—of Hud.

† —Of cattle,—of the spoils,—of the prophets. That the Alcoran bears a very strong resemblance to the Talmud is indeed evident ; but I hardly think, we can have a more striking instance of the prejudices of modern infidels, than in their comparing this motley composition to the writings of the Old and New Testament. Let the reader but take the trouble to peruse the history of Joseph by Mahomet, which is the subject of a very long chapter, and to compare it with the account of that patriarch given by Moses, and if he doth not perceive at once the immense inferiority of the former, I shall never, for my part, undertake by argument to convince him of it. To me it appears even almost incredible, that the most beautiful and most affecting passages of holy writ, should have been

Passing, therefore, this equivocal miracle, if I may call it so, which I imagine was of

so wretchedly disfigured by a writer whose intention, we are certain, was not to burlesque them. But that every reader may be qualified to form some notion of this miracle of a book, I have subjoined a specimen of it, from the chapter of *the ant*; where we are informed particularly of the cause of the visit which the queen of Sheba (there called *Saba*) made to Solomon, and of the occasion of her conversion from idolatry. I have not selected this passage on account of any special futility to be found in it, for the like absurdities may be observed in every page of the performance; but I have selected it, because it is short, and because it contains a distinct story which bears some relation to a passage of scripture. I use Mr. Sale's version, which is the latest and the most approved, omitting only, for the sake of brevity, such supplementary expressions, as have been without necessity inserted by the translator. " Solomon was
 " David's heir; and he said, O men, we have been
 " taught the speech of birds, and have had all things
 " bestowed on us; this is manifest excellence. And
 " his armies were gathered together to Solomon, consisting of genii, and men, and birds; and they
 " were led in distinct bands, till they came to the
 " valley of ants. An ant said, O ants, enter ye into
 " your habitations, lest Solomon and his army tread
 " you under foot, and perceive it not. And he smiled, laughing at her words, and said, O Lord, excite me, that I may be thankful for thy favour,
 " wherewith thou hast favoured me, and my parents;

very little use in *making* profelytes, whatever use it might have had in *confirming* and

“ and that I may do that which is right and well-
“ pleasing to thee : and introduce me, through thy
“ mercy, among thy servants the righteous. And he
“ viewed the birds, and said, What is the reason that
“ I see not the lapwing ? Is she absent ? Verily I will
“ chastise her with a severe chastisement, or I will put
“ her to death ; unless she bring me a just excuse.
“ And she tarried not long, and said, I have viewed
“ that which thou hast not viewed ; and I come to
“ thee from Saba, with a certain piece of news. I
“ found a woman to reign over them, who is provided
“ with every thing, and hath a magnificent throne.
“ I found her and her people to worship the sun, be-
“ sides God : and Satan hath prepared their works for
“ them, and hath turned them aside from the way
“ (wherefore they are not directed), lest they should
“ worship God, who bringeth to light that which is
“ hidden in heaven and earth, and knoweth whatever
“ they conceal, and whatever they discover. God ! there
“ is no God but he ; the Lord of the magnificent
“ throne. He said, We shall see whether thou hast spoken
“ the truth, or whether thou art a liar. Go with this my let-
“ ter, and cast it down to them, then turn aside from them,
“ and wait for their answer. The queen said, O no-
“ bles, verily an honourable letter hath been deliver-
“ ed to me ; it is from Solomon, and this is the tenor
“ thereof. *In the name of the most merciful God, rise*
“ *not up against me : but come, and surrender yourselves*
“ *to me.* She said, O nobles, advise me in my busi-
“ ness : I will not resolve on any thing, till ye be

tutoring those already made; it may be worth while to inquire, what were the reasons, that

“ witnesses thereof. They answered, we are endued
 “ with strength, and endued with great prowess in
 “ war; but the command appertaineth to thee: see
 “ therefore what thou wilt command. She said, Verily
 “ kings, when they enter a city, waste the same, and
 “ abase the most powerful of the inhabitants thereof:
 “ and so will these do. But I will send gifts to them;
 “ and will wait for what those who shall be sent shall
 “ bring back. And when the ambaffador came to
 “ Solomon, that prince said, Will ye present me with
 “ riches? Verily that which God hath given me is bet-
 “ ter than what he hath given you: but ye glory in
 “ your gifts. Return to your people. We will sure-
 “ ly come to them with forces, which they shall not
 “ be able to withstand; and we will drive them out
 “ humbled; and they shall be contemptible. And
 “ Solomon said, O nobles, which of you will bring me
 “ her throne, before they come and surrender them-
 “ selves to me? A terrible genius answered, I will
 “ bring it thee, before thou arise from thy place. And
 “ one with whom was the knowledge of the scripture
 “ said, I will bring it to thee in the twinkling of an eye.
 “ And when Solomon saw it placed before him, he
 “ said, This is a favour of my Lord, that he may
 “ make trial of me, whether I will be grateful, or
 “ whether I will be ungrateful: and he who is grate-
 “ ful, is grateful to his own advantage; but if any
 “ shall be ungrateful, verily my Lord is self-sufficient
 “ and munificent. And he said, Alter her throne, that
 “ she may not know it, to the end we may see whe-

an engine of such amazing influence was never employed by one who assumed a cha-

“ther she be directed, or whether she be of those
“who are not directed. And when she was come, it
“was said, Is thy throne like this? She answered, As
“though it were the same. And we have had know-
“ledge bestowed on us before this, and have been re-
“signed. But that which she worshipped besides God,
“had turned her aside, for she was of an unbelieving
“people. It was said to her, Enter the palace. And
“when she saw it, she imagined it to be a great water,
“and she discovered her legs. Solomon said, Verily
“this is a palace, evenly floored with glass. She
“said, O Lord, verily I have dealt unjustly with my
“own soul; and I resign myself, together with Solo-
“mon, to God, the Lord of all creatures.” Thus
poverty of sentiment, monstrosity of invention, which
always betokens a distempered, not a rich imagination,
and in respect of diction the most turgid verbosity, so
apt to be mistaken by persons of a vitiated taste for
true sublimity, are the genuine characteristics of the
book. They appear almost in every line. The very titles
and epithets assigned to God are not exempt from them.
The Lord of the daybreak, the Lord of the magnificent
throne, the King of the day of judgment, &c. They
are pompous and insignificant. If the language of the
Alcoran, as the Mahometans pretend, is indeed the lan-
guage of God, the thoughts are but too evidently the
thoughts of men. The reverse of this is the charac-
ter of the Bible. When God speaks to men, it is rea-
sonable to think that he addresses them in their own
language. In the Bible you will see nothing inflated,

rafter so eminent, as the *chief of God's apostles*, and the *seal of the prophets*? Was it the want of address to manage an imposition of this nature? None who knows the history of this extraordinary personage, will suspect that he wanted either the genius to contrive, or the resolution and dexterity to execute, any practicable expedient for promoting his grand design; which was no less than that extensive despotism, both religious and political, he at length acquired. Was it that he had too much honesty to concert and carry on so gross an artifice? Those who believe him to have been an impostor in pretending a divine mission, will hardly suspect him of such delicacy in the methods he would take to accomplish his aim. But in fact there is no colour of reason for such a suggestion. There was no prodigy, no miraculous interposition, which he hesitated to give out, however extravagant, when he saw it would contribute to his ends. Prodigies of which they had no other evidence

nothing affected in the style. The words are human, but the sentiments are divine. Accordingly, there is perhaps no book in the world, as hath been often justly observed, which suffers less by a literal translation into any other language.

but his own allegation, he knew his adversaries might *deny*, but could not *disprove*. His scruples therefore, we may well conclude, proceeded not from *probity*, but from *prudence*; and were solely against such miracles, as must be subjected to the scrutiny of other people's senses. Was it that miracle-working had before that time become so stale a device, that, instead of gaining him the admiration of his countrymen, it would have exposed him to their laughter and contempt? The most cursory perusal of the Alcoran, will, to every man of sense, afford an unanswerable confutation of this hypothesis *. Lastly, was it that he liv-

* It is observable, that Mahomet was very much harassed by the demands and reasonings of his opposers with regard to miracles. They were so far from despising this evidence, that they considered the power of working miracles as a never-failing badge of the prophetic office; and therefore often assured him, by the most solemn oaths and protestations, that they would submit implicitly to his guidance in religion, if he would once gratify them in this particular. This artful man, who doth not seem to have been of the same opinion with the essayist, that it was easy for cunning and impudence to impose, in a matter of this kind, on the credulity of the multitude, even though an ignorant and barbarous multitude, absolutely refused to subject his mission to so hazardous a trial. There is no

ed in an enlightened age, and amongst a civilized and learned people, who were too quick-sighted to be deceived by tricks, which among barbarians might have produced the most astonishing effects? Quite the reverse. He lived in a barbarous age, and amongst an illiterate people, with whom, if with any, he had reason to believe the grossest deceit would prove successful.

subject he more frequently recurs to in his Alcoran, being greatly interested to remove the doubts, which were raised in the minds of many, by his disclaiming this power; a power which, till then, had ever been looked upon as the prerogative of the prophets. The following are some of the reasons with which he endeavours to satisfy the people on this head. 1st, The *sovereignty* of God, who is not to be called to account for what he gives or withholds. 2d, The *uselessness* of miracles, because every man is foreordained either to believe, or to remain in unbelief; and this decree no miracles could alter. 3d, The *experienced inefficacy* of miracles in former times. 4th, The *mercy* of God, who had denied them this evidence, because the sin of their incredulity, in case he had granted it, would have been so heinous, that he could not have respited or tolerated them any longer. 5th, The *abuse* to which miracles would have been exposed from the infidels, who would have either charged them with imposture, or imputed them to magic. See the chapters—of cattle,—of thunder,—of Al Hejir,—of the night journey,—of the spider,—of the prophets.

What pity was it, that Mahomet had not a counsellor so deeply versed in human nature as the essayist, who could have assured him, that there needed but effrontery and enterprise; that with these auxiliaries he had reason to hope the most impudent pretences would be crowned with success? The too timid prophet would doubtless have remonstrated against this spirited counsel, insisting, that it was one thing to satisfy *friends*, and another thing to silence or convert *enemies*; that it was one thing to impose on mens *intellects*, and another thing to deceive their *senses*: that though an attempt of the last kind should succeed with some, yet if the fraud were detected by any, and he might expect that his adversaries would exert themselves in order to detect it, the whole mystery of craft would be divulged, his friends would become suspicious, and the spectators of such pretended miracles would become daily more prying and critical; that the consequences would infallibly prove fatal to the whole design; and that therefore such a cheat was on no account whatever to be risked. To this methinks I hear the other replying with some earnestness, "Make but the trial, and you will certainly find, that what judgment,

“ nay, and what senses your auditors have,
“ they will renounce by principle in those
“ sublime and mysterious subjects; they will
“ imagine they see and hear what has no rea-
“ lity, nay, whatever you shall desire that
“ they should see and hear. Their credulity
“ (forgive a freedom which my zeal inspires)
“ will increase your impudence, and your
“ impudence will overpower their credulity.
“ The smallest spark may here kindle into
“ the greatest flame; because the materials
“ are always prepared for it. The *avidum*
“ *genus auricularum* swallow greedily, with-
“ out examination, whatever soothes super-
“ stition and promotes wonder.” Whether
the judicious reader will reckon that the pro-
phet or his counsellor would have had the
better in this debate, I shall not take upon
me to decide. One perhaps (if I might be
indulged in a conjecture) whose notions are
founded in metaphysical refinements, or whose
resolutions are influenced by oratorical de-
clamation, will incline to the opinion of the
latter. One whose sentiments are the result
of a practical knowledge of mankind, will
probably subscribe to the judgment of the
former, and will allow, that in this instance

the CAPTAIN-GENERAL and PROPHET of *Islamism* acted the more prudent part.

Shall we then say, that it was a more *obscure* theatre on which JESUS CHRIST appeared? Were his spectators *more ignorant*, or *less adverse*? The contrary of both is manifest. It may indeed be affirmed with truth, that the religion of the wild Arabs was more repugnant to the doctrine of Mahomet, than the religious dogmas of the Jews were to those of Jesus. But we shall err egregiously, if we conclude thence, that to this repugnancy the repugnancy of disposition in the professors of these religions must be proportionate. It is a fine observation of the most piercing and comprehensive genius, which hath appeared in this age, That “ though men have a very
“ strong tendency to idolatry, they are never-
“ theless but little attached to idolatrous re-
“ ligions; that though they have no great
“ tendency to spiritual ideas, they are never-
“ theless strongly attached to religions which
“ enjoin the adoration of a spiritual being *.” Hence an attachment in JEWS, CHRISTIANS, and MAHOMETANS, to their respective religions, which was never displayed by POLYTHEISTS of any denomination. But its *spi-*

* De l'Esprit des Loix, liv. 25. chap. 2.

rituality was not the only cause of adherence which the Jews had to their religion. Every physical, every moral motive concurred in that people to rivet their attachment, and make them oppose with violence, whatever bore the face of innovation. Their religion and polity were so blended as scarce to be distinguishable: this engaged their *patriotism*. They were selected of God preferably to other nations: this inflamed their *pride* *. They were all under one spiritual head, the high-priest, and had their solemn festivals celebrated in one temple: this strengthened their *union*. The ceremonies of their public worship were magnificent: this flattered their *senses*. These ceremonies also were numerous, and occupied a great part of their time: this, to all the other grounds of attachment, super-added the force of *habit*. On the contrary, the *simplicity* of the gospel, as well as the spirit of *humility*, and *moderation*, and *charity*, and *universality* (if I may be allowed that term), which it breathed, could not fail to alarm a people of such a cast, and awaken, as in fact it did, the most furious opposition. Accordingly, Christianity had fifty times more

* How great influence this motive had, appears from Luke iv. 25, &c. and from Acts xxii. 21, 22.

success amongst idolaters, than it had among the Jews. I am therefore warranted to assert, that if the miracles of our Lord and his apostles had been an imposture, there could not, on the face of the earth, have been chosen for exhibiting them, a more unfavourable theatre than *Judea*. On the other hand, had it been any where practicable, by a display of false wonders, to make converts to a new religion, no where could a project of this nature have been conducted with greater probability of success than in *Arabia*. So much for the contrast there is betwixt the *Christian* MESSIAH and the ORPHAN CHARGE of *Abu Taleb*. So plain it is, that the *mosque* yields entirely the plea of miracles to the *synagogue* and the *church*.

BUT from HEATHENS and MAHOMETANS, let us turn our eyes to the CHRISTIAN world. The only object here, which merits our attention, as coming under the denomination of miracles ascribed to a new system, and as what may be thought to rival in credibility the miracles of the gospel, are those said to have been performed in the *primitive church*, after the times of the apostles, and after the finishing of the sacred canon. These will

probably be ascribed to a new system, since Christianity, for some centuries, was not (as the phrase is) *established*, or (to speak more properly) *corrupted* by human authority; and since even after such establishment, there remained long in the empire a considerable mixture of idolaters. We have the greater reason here to consider this topic, as it hath of late been the subject of very warm dispute, and as the cause of Christianity itself (which I conceive is totally distinct) seems to have been strangely confounded with it. From the manner in which the argument hath been conducted, who is there that would not conclude, that both must stand or fall together? Nothing however can be more groundless, nothing more injurious to the religion of Jesus, than such a conclusion.

The learned writer who hath given rise to this controversy, not only acknowledges, that the falsity of the miracles mentioned by the fathers, is no evidence of the falsity of the miracles recorded in scripture, but that there is even a presumption in favour of these, arising from those forgeries, which he pretends to have detected *. The justness of the re-

* Dr. Middleton's prefatory discourse to his letter from Rome.

mark contained in this acknowledgment, will appear more clearly from the following observations.

Let it be observed, first, that supposing numbers of people are ascertained of the truth of some miracles, whether their conviction arise from sense or from testimony, it will surely be admitted as a consequence, that in all such persons, the presumption against miracles from uncommonness must be greatly diminished, in several perhaps totally extinguished.

Let it be observed, secondly, that if true miracles have been employed successfully in support of certain religious tenets, this success will naturally suggest to those, who are zealous of propagating favourite opinions in religion, to recur to the plea of miracles, as the most effectual expedient for accomplishing their end. This they will be encouraged to do on a double account: *first*, they know, that people, from recent experience, are made to expect such a confirmation; *secondly*, they know, that in consequence of this experience, the incredibility, which is the principal obstruction to such an undertaking, is in a manner removed; and there is, on the contrary, as in such circumstances

there certainly would be a promptness in the generality to receive them.

Add to these, that if we consult the history of mankind, or even our own experience, we shall be convinced, that hardly hath one wonderful event actually happened in any country, even where there hath not been such visible temptations to forgery, which hath not given rise to false rumours of other events similar, but still more wonderful. Hardly hath any person or people achieved some exploits truly extraordinary, to whom common report hath not quickly attributed many others, as extraordinary at least, if not impossible. As *fame* may, in this respect, be compared to a *multiplying glass*, reasonable people almost always conclude in the same way concerning both; we know that there is not a real object corresponding to every appearance exhibited, at the same time we know that there must be some objects to give rise to the appearances.

I should therefore only beg of our adversaries, that, for argument's sake, they will suppose that the miracles related in the New Testament were really performed; and and then, that they will condidly tell us,

what, according to their notions of human nature, would, in all likelihood, have been the consequences. They must be very partial to a darling hypothesis, or little acquainted with the world, who will hesitate to own, that, on this supposition, it is not barely probable, but certain, that for a few endowed with the miraculous power, there would soon have arisen numbers of pretenders; that from some miracles well attested, occasion would have been taken to propagate innumerable false reports. If so, with what colour of justice can the detection of many spurious reports among the primitive Christians be considered as a presumption against those miracles, the reality of which is the most plausible, nay, the only plausible account that can be given of the origin of such reports? The presumption is too evidently on the opposite side to need illustration.

It is not my intention here to patronize either side of the question which the Doctor's *Free Inquiry* hath occasioned. All that concerns my argument is, barely to evince, and this I imagine hath been evinced, that, granting the Doctor's plea to be well founded, there is no presumption arising hence, which tends in the lowest degree to discre-

dit the miracles recorded in holy writ ; nay, that there is a contrary presumption. In further confirmation of this truth, let me ask, Were there ever, in any region of the globe, any similar pretensions to miraculous powers, before that memorable *era*, the publication of the gospel ? Let me ask again, Since those pretensions ceased, hath it ever been in the power of the most daring enthusiast, to revive them any where in favour of a new system ? Authentic miracles will, for a time, give a currency to counterfeits ; but as the former become less frequent, the latter become more suspected, till at length they are treated with general contempt, and disappear. The danger then is, lest men, ever prone to extremes, become as extravagantly incredulous, as formerly they were credulous. *Laziness*, the true source of both, always inclines us to admit or reject in the *gross*, without entering on the irksome task of considering things in *detail*. In the first instance, knowing some such events to be true, they *admit all without examination* ; in the second, knowing some to be false, they *reject all without examination*. A procedure this, which, however excusable in the un-

thinking herd, is altogether unworthy a philosopher.

But it may be thought, that the claim to miracles in the early ages of the church, continued too long to be supported solely on the credit of those performed by our Lord and his apostles. In order to account for this, it ought to be attended to, that in the course of some centuries, the situation of affairs, with regard to religion, was really inverted. Education, and even superstition, and bigotry, and popularity, which the miracles of Christ and his apostles had to encounter, came gradually to be on the side of those wonders, said to have been performed in after times. If they were potent *enemies*, and such as, we have reason to believe, nothing but the force of truth could vanquish; they were also potent *allies*, and may well be supposed able to give a temporary triumph to falsehood, especially when it had few or no enemies to combat. But in discoursing on the prodigies said to have been performed in primitive times, I have been insensibly carried from the point, to which I proposed in this section to confine myself. From inquiring into miracles ascribed to new systems, I have proceeded to those pleaded

in confirmation of systems previously established, and generally received.

LEAVING so remote a period, I propose, lastly, to inquire, whether, since that time, any heresiarch whatever, any founder of a new sect, or publisher of a new system, hath pretended to miraculous powers. If the essayist had known of any such pretender, he surely would have mentioned him. But as he hath not afforded us any light on this subject, I shall just recal to the remembrance of my reader, those persons who, either as innovators or reformers, have made some figure in the church. They were the persons from whom, if from any, a plea of this kind might naturally have been expected; especially at a time when Europe was either plunged in barbarism, or but beginning to emerge out of it.

Was ever then this high prerogative, the power of working miracles, claimed or exercised by the founders of the sects of the Waldenses and Albigenes? Did Wickliff in England pretend to it? Did Hufs or Jerom in Bohemia? To come nearer modern times, Did Luther in Germany, Zuinglius in Switzerland, Calvin in France, or any o-

ther of the reformers, advance this plea? Do such of them as are authors, mention in their writings any miracles they performed, or appeal to them as the evidences of their doctrine? Do contemporary historians allege, that they challenged the faith of their auditors, in consequence of such supernatural powers! I admit, if they did, that their miracles might be ascribed to a new system. For though they pretended only to re-establish the Christian institution, in its native purity, expunging those pernicious interpolations, which a false philosophy had foisted into the doctrinal part, and Pagan superstition into the moral and the ritual; yet as the religion they inculcated, greatly differed from the faith and worship of the times, it might, in this respect, be denominated a new system; and would be encountered by all the violence and prejudice, which novelties in religion never fail to excite. Not that the want of real miracles was a presumption against the truth of their doctrine. The God of nature, who is the God of Christians, does nothing in vain. No new revelation was pretended to; consequently there was no occasion for such supernatural support. They appealed to the revelation for-

merly bestowed, and by all parties acknowledged, as to the proper rule in this controversy : they appealed to the reason of mankind as the judge ; and the reason of mankind was a competent judge of the conformity of their doctrine to this unerring rule.

But how, upon the author's principles, shall we account for this moderation in the reformers ? Were they, in his judgment, calm inquirers into truth ? Were they dispassionate reasoners in defence of it ? Far otherwise. He tells us, " They may safely " be pronounced to have been universally " inflamed with the highest enthusiasm *." And doubtless we cannot expect from this hand a more amiable picture of their disciples. May not we then, in our turn, safely pronounce, this writer himself being judge, that for a man to imagine he sees what hath no reality, to impose in this manner not only on his own understanding, but even on his external senses, is a pitch of delusion higher than the highest enthusiasm can produce, and is to be imputed only to downright frenzy † ?

* History of Great Britain, James I. chap. 1.

† Perhaps it will be pleaded, that the working of miracles was considered by the leaders in the Reforma-

Since the world began, there hath not appeared a more general propension to the
tion as a Popish artifice, and as therefore worthy of being discarded with the other abuses which Popery had introduced. That this was not the light in which miracles were viewed by Luther, who justly possesses the first place in the list of reformers, is evident from the manner in which he argues against Muncer, the apostle of the Anabaptists. This man, without ordination, had assumed the office of a Christian pastor. Against this conduct Luther remonstrates, as being, in his judgment, an usurpation of the sacred function. "Let him be asked," says he, "Who made him a teacher of religion? If he answers, God; let him prove it by a visible *miracle*: for it is by such signs that God declares himself, when he gives an extraordinary mission." When this argument was afterwards retorted on himself by the Romanists, who desired to know how his own vocation, originally limited and dependent, had become not only unlimited, but quite independent of the hierarchy, from which he had received it; his reply was, That the *intrepidity* with which he had been enabled to brave so many dangers, and the *success* with which his enterprise had been crowned, ought to be regarded as miraculous: And indeed most of his followers were of this opinion. But whether this opinion was erroneous, or whether the argument against Muncer was conclusive, it is not my business to inquire. Thus much is evident from the story: *first*, That this reformer, far from rejecting miracles as a Romish trick, acknowledged, that in some religious questions, they are the only medium of proof; *secondly*, That notwith-

wildest fanaticism, a greater degree of credulity in every claim that was made to the illapses of the Holy Spirit, or a more thorough contempt of all established modes of worship, than appeared in this island about the middle of the last century. It is astonishing, that when the minds of men were intoxicated with enthusiasm; when every new pretender to divine illuminations was quickly surrounded by a crowd of followers, and his most incoherent effusions greedily swallowed as the dictates of the Holy Ghost; that in such a Babel of sectaries, none are to be found, who advanced a claim to the power of working miracles; a claim which, in the author's opinion, though false, is easily supported, and wonderfully successful, especially among enthusiasts. Yet, to Mr. Hume himself, who hath written the history of that

standing this, he never attempted, by a show of miracles, to impose on the senses of his hearers (if they were deceived in thinking that his success and magnanimity were miraculous, it was not their senses, but their understanding that was deceived); *lastly*, That the Anabaptists themselves, though perhaps the most outrageous fanatics that ever existed, did not pretend to the power of working miracles.—*Sleidan, lib. 5. Luth. De votis monast. &c. Epist. ad Frid. Sax. Ducem. ap. Chytraum.*

period, and who will not be accused of neglecting to mark the extravagancies effected by enthusiasm, I appeal whether this remark be just.

Will it be alleged as an exception, that one or two frantic people among the Quakers, not the leaders of the party, did actually pretend to such a power? Let it be remembered, that this conduct had no other consequences, but to bring upon the pretenders such a general contempt, as in that fanatical and gloomy age, the most unintelligible jargon or glaring nonsense would never have been able to produce.

Will it be urged by the essayist, that even in the beginning of the present century, this plea was revived in Britain by the French prophets, a set of poor visionaries, who, by the barbarity with which they had been treated in their own country, had been wrought up to madness, before they took refuge in this? I must beg leave to remind him, that it is manifest, from the history of those delirious and unhappy creatures, that by no part of their conduct did they so effectually open the eyes of mankind, naturally credulous, discredit their own inspirations, and ruin their cause, as by this not

less foolish than presumptuous pretence. Accordingly they are perhaps the only sect, which hath sprung up so lately, made so great a bustle for a while, and which is nevertheless at this day totally extinct. It deserves also to be remarked concerning this people, that though they were mad enough to imagine that they could restore a dead man to life; nay, though they proceeded so far, as to determine and announce beforehand the day and the hour of his resurrection; yet none of them were so distracted, as to imagine, that they had seen him rise; not one of them afterwards pretended, that their prediction had been fulfilled. Thus even a frenzy, which had quite disordered their intellects, could not in this instance overpower their senses.

UPON the whole, therefore, till some contrary example is produced, I may warrantably conclude,—that the religion of the BIBLE is the only religion extant, which claims to have been recommended by the evidence of *miracles*;—that though, in different ages and countries, numberless enthusiasts have arisen, extremely few have dared to advance this plea;—that where-

ever any have had the boldness to recur to it, it hath proved the bane, and not the support of their cause. Thus it hath been evinced, as was proposed, that there is no presumption arising from the *history of the world*, which can in the least invalidate the argument from miracles, in defence of Christianity.

SECT. III.

No miracles recorded by historians of other religions are subversive of the evidence arising from the miracles wrought in proof of Christianity, or can be considered as contrary testimony.

“ **W**HY is a miracle regarded as evidence
“ of a religious doctrine?” Or, “What connection is there between an act of power
“ admitted to be supernatural, and the truth
“ of a proposition pronounced by the person who exerts that power?” These are questions, which some of our infidels have exulted in as unanswerable: and they are questions, which it is proper to examine a little; not so much for their own sake, as because a satisfactory answer to them may throw light on the subject of this section.

A man, I suppose, of an unblemished cha-

rafter, advanceth doctrines in religion, unknown before, but not in themselves apparently impious or absurd. We interrogate him about the manner wherein he attained the knowledge of those doctrines. He affirms, That by no process of reasoning, nor in any other natural way, did he discover them; but that they were revealed to him by the Spirit of God. It must be owned, there is a very strong presumption against the truth of what he says; and it is of consequence to inquire, whence that presumption ariseth. It is not primarily from any doubt of the man's integrity. If the fact he related were of an ordinary nature, the reputation he has hitherto maintained would secure him from being suspected of an intended deceit. It is not from any absurdity or immoral tendency we perceive in the doctrine itself. It ariseth principally, if not solely, from these two circumstances, the extreme uncommonness of such a revelation, and the great facility with which people of strong fancy may, in this particular, impose upon themselves. The man, I suppose, acquaints us further, that God, when he communicated to him the truths he publishes, communicated also the power of working miracles,

such as, of giving sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, of raising the dead, and making whole the maimed. It is evident, that we have precisely the same presumption against his being endued with such a power, as against his having obtained such a revelation. Two things are asserted : there is one presumption, and but one, against them ; and it equally affects them both. Whatever proves either assertion, removes the only presumption which hinders our belief of the other. The man, I suppose, lastly, performs the miracles before us, which he said he was commissioned to perform. We can no longer doubt of a supernatural communication. We have now all the evidence which the integrity of the person could give us, as to any ordinary event attested by him, that the doctrine he delivers as from God, is from God, and therefore true.

Nay we have more evidence than for any common fact, vouched by a person of undoubted probity. As God is both almighty and all-wise, if he hath bestowed on any so uncommon a privilege, it is highly probable, that it is bestowed for promoting some end uncommonly important. And what more important end than to reveal to men that

which may be conducive to their present and eternal happiness? It may be said, That, at most, it can only prove the interposal of some power superior to human: the being who interposeth is perhaps a bad being, and intends to deceive us. This, it may be allowed, is *possible*; but the other is *probable*. For, *first*, From the light of nature, we have no positive evidence of the existence of such intermediate beings, good or bad. Their existence is therefore only possible. Of the existence and perfections of God, we have the highest moral assurance. *Secondly*, If there were such beings, that raising the dead, and giving sight to the blind, should come within the verge of their power, is also but possible; that they are within the sphere of omnipotence is certain. *Thirdly*, Whatever seems to imply a suspension of any of the established laws of nature, we may presume with great appearance of reason, proceeds from the Author of nature, either *immediately*, or, which amounts to the same thing, *mediately*; that is by the intervention of some agent empowered by him. To all these there will also accrue presumptions, not only, as was hinted already, from the character of the preacher, but from the apparent tendency of the doctrine,

and from the effect it produceth on those who receive it. And now the connection between the miracle and the doctrine is obvious. The miracle removes the improbability of a supernatural communication, of which communication it is in fact an irrefragable evidence. This improbability, which was the only obstacle, being removed, the doctrine hath at least all the evidence of a common fact, attested by a man of known virtue and good sense.

In order to illustrate this further, I shall recur to the instance I have already had occasion to consider, of the Dutchman and the King of Siam. I shall suppose, that, besides the account given by the former of the freezing of water in Holland, he had informed the prince of the astonishing effects produced by gunpowder, with which the latter had been entirely unacquainted. Both accounts appear to him alike incredible, or, if you please, absolutely impossible. Some time afterwards, the Dutchman gets imported into the kingdom a sufficient quantity of gunpowder; with the necessary artillery. He informs the monarch of this acquisition; who having permitted him to make experiments on some of his cattle and buildings,

perceives, with inexpressible amazement, that all the European had told him, of the celerity and violence with which this destructive powder operates, is strictly conformable to truth. I ask any considerate person, Would not this be enough to restore the stranger to the Indian's good opinion, which, I suppose, his former experienced honesty had entitled him to? Would it not remove the incredibility of the account he had given of the freezing of water in northern countries? Yet, if abstractly considered, what connection is there between the effects of gunpowder and the effects of cold? But the presumption arising from miracles, in favour of the doctrine published by the performer, as divinely inspired, must be incomparably stronger; since from what hath been said, it appears to have several peculiar circumstances, which add weight to it. It is evident, then, that miracles are a proper proof, and perhaps the only proper proof, of a revelation from Heaven. But it is also evident, that miracles may be wrought for other purposes, and may not be intended as proofs of any doctrine whatsoever.

THUS much being premised, I shall exa-

mine another very curious argument of the essayist: "There is no testimony," says he, "for any prodigy, that is not opposed by an infinite number of witnesses; so that not only the miracle destroys the credit of the testimony, but even the testimony destroys itself*." In order to illustrate this strange position, he observes, that, "in matters of religion, whatever is different is contrary; and that it is impossible the religions of ancient Rome, of Turkey, of Siam, and of China, should all of them be established on any solid foundation. Every miracle, therefore, pretended to have been wrought in any of these religions, (and all of them abound in miracles) as its direct scope is to establish the particular system to which it is attributed, so it has the same force, though more indirectly, to overthrow every other system. In destroying a rival system, it likewise destroys the credit of those miracles, on which that system was established; so that all the prodigies of different religions are to be regarded as contrary facts, and the evidences of these prodigies, whether weak or strong, as opposite to each other." Never did an au-

* P. 190, &c.

thor more artfully avail himself of indefinite expressions. With what admirable sleight does he vary his phrases so as to make the inadvertent reader look upon them as synonymous, when in fact their significations are totally distinct? Thus what, by a most extraordinary idiom, is called at first, "miracles wrought in a religion," we are next to regard, as "miracles attributed to a particular system," and lastly, as "miracles the direct scope of which is to establish that system." Every body, I will venture to say, in beginning to read the sentence, if he forms any notion of what the author means by a "miracle wrought in a religion," understands it barely as a "miracle wrought among those who profess a particular religion," the words appearing to be used in the same latitude, as when we call the traditional tales current among the Jews, though they should have no relation to religion, Jewish tales; and those, in like manner, Mahometan or Pagan tales, which are current among Mahometans or Pagans. Such a miracle, the reader, ere he is aware, is brought to consider as a miracle attributed to a particular system; nay further, as "a miracle, the direct scope of which is to establish

“that system.” Yet nothing can be conceived more different than the meaning of these expressions, which are here jumbled together as equivalent.

It is plain, that all the miracles of which there is any record, come under the first denomination. They are all supposed to have been wrought before men, or among men; and wherever there are men, there is religion of some kind or other. Perhaps too, all may, in a very *improper* sense, be attributed to a religious system. They all imply an interruption of the ordinary course of nature. Such an interruption, wherever it is observed, will be ascribed to the agency of those divinities that are adored by the observers, and so may be said to be attributed by them to their own system. But where are the miracles (those of holy writ excepted) of which you can say, with propriety, it is their direct scope to establish a particular system? Must we not then be strangely blinded by the charm of a few ambiguous terms, if we are made to confound things so widely different? Yet this confusion is the very basis on which the author founds his reasoning, and rears this tremendous doctrine, That “a miracle of Mahomet, or any

" of his successors," and, by parity of reason, a miracle of Christ, or any of his apostles, " is refuted (as if it had been mentioned, and had, in express terms, been contradicted) by the testimony of Titus Livius, Plutarch, Tacitus, and of all the authors, Chinese, Grecian, and Roman Catholic, who have related any miracles in their particular religions." Here all the miracles, that have been related by men of different religions, are blended, as coming under the common denomination of miracles the direct scope of which was to establish those particular religious systems; an insinuation, in which there is not even the shadow of truth.

That the reader may be satisfied on this point, I must beg his attention to the following observations concerning the miracles of profane history. *First*, Many facts are related as miraculous, where we may admit the fact, without acknowledging the miracle. Instances of this kind we have in relations concerning comets, eclipses, meteors, earthquakes, and such like. *Secondly*, The miracles may be admitted as genuine, and the manner in which historians account for them, rejected as absurd. The one is a matter of testimony,

the other of conjecture. In this a man is influenced by education, by prejudices, by received opinions. In every country, as was observed already, men will recur to the theology of the place, for the solution of every phenomenon supposed miraculous. But, that it was the scope of the miracle to support the theology, is one thing; and that fanciful men thought they discovered in the theology the causes of the miracle, is another. The inhabitants of Lystra accounted, from the principles of their own religion, for the miracles performed in their city by Paul and Barnabas *. Was it therefore the scope of that miracle to support the Lycaonian religion? *Thirdly*, Many miracles are recorded, as produced directly by Heaven, without the ministration of men: by what construction are these discovered to be proofs of a particular system? Yet these also, wherever they happen, will be accounted for by the natives of the country, from the principles of their own superstition. Had any of the Pagan citizens escaped the ruin in which Sodom was miraculously involved, they would doubtless have fought for the cause of this destruction in the established mode of polytheism, and

* Acts xiv. 8. &c.

would probably have imputed it to the vengeance of some of their deities, incurred by the neglect of some frivolous ceremony. Would it therefore have been the scope of the miracle to confirm this nonsense? *Fourthly*, Even miracles said to have been performed by a man, are no evidences of the truth of that man's opinions; such, I mean, as he pretends not to have received by revelation, but by the exercise of reason, by education, or by information from other men; no more than a man's being endowed with bodily strength greater than ordinary, would prove him to be superior to others in his mental faculties. I conclude with declaring, that if instances shall be produced, of miracles wrought by men of probity, in proof of doctrines which they affirm to have been revealed to them from Heaven, and which are repugnant to the doctrine of the Bible, then I shall think it equitable to admit, that religious miracles contradict one another. Then will reasonable people be reduced to the dilemma, either of disproving the allegations on one side, or of acknowledging that miracles can be no evidence of revelation. No attempt, however, hath as yet been made by

any writer to produce an instance of this kind.

“ But will nothing less satisfy,” replies the author. “ Will not the predictions of augurs and oracles, and the intimations said to have been given by the gods or saints in dreams and visions, of things not otherwise knowable by those to whom they were thus intimated; will not these, and such like prodigies, serve in some degree as evidence?” As evidence of what? Shall we say, of any religious principles conveyed at the same time by revelation? No, it is not even pretended that there were any such principles so conveyed; but as evidence of principles which had been long before entertained, and which were originally imbibed from education, and from education only. That the evidence here, supposing the truth of the facts, is at best but very indirect, and by no means on the same footing with that of the miracles recorded in the gospel, might be easily evinced, if there were occasion. But there is in reality no occasion, since there is no such evidence of the facts as can justly entitle them to our notice. Let it be remembered, that, in the fourth section of the first part, it was shown, that there is the

greatest disparity in respect of evidence, betwixt miracles performed in proof of a religion *to be* established, and in *contradiction* to opinions generally received; and miracles performed, on the contrary, in support of a religion *already* established, and in *confirmation* of opinions generally received; that, in the former case, there is the strongest presumption *for* the miracles, in the latter *against* them. Let it also be remembered, that in the preceding section, it was shown, that the religion of the Bible is the only religion extant, which claims to have been ushered into the world by miracles; that this prerogative neither the Pagan religion, the Mahometan, nor the Roman Catholic, can, with any appearance of reason, arrogate; and that, by consequence, there is one of the strongest presumptions possible *for* the miracles of the gospel, which is not only wanting in the miracles of other religions, but which is contrasted by the strongest presumption possible *against* these miracles. And though this presumption should not, in all cases, be accounted absolutely insuperable, we must at least say, it gives an immense superiority to the proofs of Christianity. It were an endless and a fruitless task, to canvass particularly

the evidence of all the pretended miracles either of Paganism or Popery (for on this head Mahometism is much more modest) but as the author hath selected some, which he considers as the best attested, of both religions, these shall be examined severally in the two subsequent sections. From this examination a tolerable judgment may be formed concerning the pretensions of these two species of superstition.

But from what hath been said, it is evident, that the contrariety which the author pretends to have discovered in the miracles said to have been wrought, as he expresseth it, in different religions, vanishes entirely on a close inspection. He is even sensible of this himself; and, as is customary with orators, the more inconclusive his reasons are, so much the more positive are his assertions. "This argument," says he, "may appear over subtle and refined;" indeed so subtle and refined, that it is invisible altogether; "but—is not *in reality* different from the reasoning of a judge, who supposes that the credit of two witnesses maintaining a crime against any one, is destroyed by the testimony of two others, who affirm him to have been two hun-

“dred leagues distant, at the same instant
 “when the crime is said to have been com-
 “mitted.” After the particle *but*, with
 which this clause begins, the reader natu-
 rally expects such an explication of the ar-
 gument, as will convince him, that though
subtile and *refined*, it hath *solidity* and *strength*.
 Instead of this, he hath only the author’s
word warranting it to be good to all intents:
 “But is *not in reality* different,” &c. The a-
 nalogy between his *example* and his *argument*
 seems to be but very distant; I shall there-
 fore, without any comment, leave it with the
 reader as I find it.

THUS it appears, that, for aught the au-
 thor hath as yet proved, no miracles record-
 ed by historians of other religions are sub-
 versive of the evidence arising from the
 miracles wrought in proof of Christianity,
 or can justly be considered as contrary tes-
 timony.

SECT. IV.

*Examination of the PAGAN miracles mentioned by Mr.
 Hume.*

SHOULD one read attentively the *Essay on
 Miracles*, and consider it solely as a philoso-

phical disquisition on an abstract question, like most of the other pieces in the same collection; he could not fail to wonder, what had induced the author so suddenly to change sides in the debate, and, by doing so, to contradict himself in terms the most express. Does he not, in the latter part of that performance, as warmly contend for the reality of some miracles, as he had pleaded in the former part, for the *impossibility* of all? It is true, he generally concludes concerning those, that they are "gross and palpable falsehoods." But this serves only to render his conduct the more mysterious, as that conclusion is always preceded by an attempt to evince, that we have the greatest reason to receive them as "certain and infallible truths." Nay, so entirely doth his *zeal* make him forget even his most positive assertions (and what inconsistencies may not be dreaded from an excess of *zeal*!), that he shows minutely we have those very evidences for the miracles he is pleased to patronize, which he had strenuously argued, were not to be found in support of any miracles whatever.

"There is not to be found," he affirms*,

* P. 183.

“ in all history, a miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves ; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others ; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose, in case of being detected in any falsehood ; and at the same time attesting facts performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable.” We need only turn over a few pages of the *Essay*, and we shall find the author taking great pains to convince us, that all these circumstances concurred in support of certain miracles, which, notwithstanding his *general resolution*, he has thought fit to honour with a very particular attention.

He has not indeed told us *how many* witnesses, in his way of reckoning, will constitute “ a sufficient number ;” but for some miracles which he relates, he gives us *clouds* of witnesses, one cloud succeeding another : for the Molinists, who tried to discredit them, “ soon found themselves overwhelmed by a

“ cloud of *new* witnesses, one hundred and
 “ twenty in number*.” As to the cha-
 racter of the witnesses, “ most of them were
 “ persons of credit and substance in Paris†;”
 again, those miracles “ were attested by
 “ witnesses of credit and distinction, before
 “ judges of unquestioned integrity‡;” and,
 “ they were proved by witnesses, before the
 “ officiality or bishop’s court of Paris, under
 “ the eyes of Cardinal Noailles, whose cha-
 “ racter for integrity and capacity was never
 “ contested even by his enemies§;” again,
 “ the secular clergy of France, particularly
 “ the rectors or *curés* of Paris, give testi-
 “ mony to these impostures, than whom no
 “ clergy are more celebrated for strictness
 “ of life and manners||.” Once more, one
 principal witness, “ *Monsieur de Montgeron*,
 “ was counsellor or judge of the parliament
 “ of Paris, a man of figure and character¶;”
 another, “ no less a man than the *Duc de*
 “ *Chatillon*, a Duke and Peer of France, of
 “ the highest rank and family**.” It is
 strange, if *credit*, and *substance*, and *distinc-*
tion, and *capacity*, are not sufficient securities
 to us, that the witnesses were not “ them-

* P. 197, in the note.

† Ib. ‡ P. 195.

§ P. 196, in the note.

|| P. 199, in the note.

¶ P. 195, in the note.

** P. 199, in the note.

“ selves deluded ;” it is strange, if *uncontested integrity*, and *eminent strictness* of life and manners, cannot remove “ all suspicion of “ any design in them to deceive others;” it is strange, if one who was *counsellor* of the parliament of Paris, a man of figure and character, and if another, who was a *Duke* and Peer of France, of the highest rank and family, had not “ a great deal to lose, in “ case of being detected in any falsehood :” nay, and if all those witnesses of *credit* and *distinction*, “ had not also a great deal to “ lose;” “ since the Jesuits, a learned body, “ supported by the civil magistrate, were “ determined enemies to those opinions, in “ whose favour the miracles were said to “ have been wrought*,” and since “ *Mon-* “ *sieur* Herault, the lieutenant *de police*, of “ whose great reputation, all who have been “ in France about that time, have heard ; “ and whose vigilance, penetration, activity, “ and extensive intelligence, have been “ much talked of; since this magistrate, “ who by the nature of his office is almost “ absolute, was invested with full powers on “ purpose to suppress these miracles, and “ frequently seized and examined the wit-

* P. 175.

“nesses and subjects of them ; though he
 “ could never reach any thing satisfactory
 “ against them *.” As to the only remain-
 ing circumstance, “ their being performed
 “ in a public manner, and in a celebrated
 “ part of the world,” this concurred also.
 They were performed, we are told, “ in a
 “ learned age, and on the most eminent
 “ theatre that is now in the world † ;” be-
 sides, “ twenty-two rectors or *curés* of Paris,
 “ with infinite earnestness, pressed the Arch-
 “ bishop, an enemy to the Jansenists, to ex-
 “ amine those miracles, which they assert to
 “ be known to the whole world, and indis-
 “ putably certain ‡”.

Thus the essayist hath laid us under the disagreeable necessity of inferring, that he is either very rash in his general assertions, or useth very great amplification in his particular narrations. Perhaps in both inferences we shall find, upon inquiry, that there is some truth. In his *History of Great Britain*, he gives us notice §, that he addressed himself “ to a more distant posterity than will ever
 “ be reached by any local or temporary theo-
 “ logy.” Why did he not likewise, in writing the *Essays*, entertain this grand idea ? It

* P. 197, in the note.

† P. 195.

‡ P. 196, in the note.

§ James I. chap. 2.

would have been of use to him. It would have prevented his falling into those inconsistencies which his too great attention and antipathy to what he calls a *local or temporary theology*, only could occasion; and which, when that theology, according to his hypothesis, shall be extinct, and when all our religious controversies shall be forgotten, must appear unaccountable and ridiculous. People will not then have the means of discovering, what is so obvious to us his contemporaries, that he only assumes the appearance of an advocate for some miracles, which are disbelieved by the generality of Protestants, his countrymen, in order, by the comparison, to vilify the miracles of sacred writ, which are acknowledged by them.

BUT to descend to particulars, I shall begin with considering those miracles for which the author is indebted to the ancient Pagans. First, In order to convince us how easy a matter it is for cunning and impudence to impose by false miracles on the credulity of barbarians, he introduces the story of Alexander of Pontus *. The justness of the account he gives of this impostor, from Lucian,

* P. 188, &c.

I shall not dispute. But that it may appear, how little the Christian religion is affected by this relation, notwithstanding some insinuations he hath intermixed with it, I shall make the following remarks.

It is of importance to know, what was the profession of this once so famous, though now forgotten Paphlogonian? Was he a publisher of strange gods? No†. Was he the founder of a new system in religion? No. What was he then? He was no other than a professed fortune-teller. What were the arts by which he carried on this gainful trade? The essayist justly remarks, that "it was a
" wise policy in him, to lay the first scene of
" his impostures in a country where the peo-

† The learned and judicious author of the *Observations on the conversion and apostleship of Saint Paul*, hath inadvertantly said of Alexander, that he introduced a *new god* into Pontus. The truth is, he only exhibited a reproduction of *Esculapius*, a well known deity in those parts, to whom he gave indeed the *new name* GLYCON. In this there was nothing unsuitable to the genius of the mythology. Accordingly, we do not find, that either the priests, or the people, were in the least alarmed for the religion of the country, or ever charged Alexander as an *innovator* in religious matters. On the contrary, the greatest enemies he had to encounter, were not the religionists, but the latitudinarians.

“ ple were extremely ignorant and stupid,
“ and ready to swallow the grossest delu-
“ sion.” For, “ had Alexander fixed his re-
“ sidence at Athens, the philosophers of that
“ renowned mart of learning had immediate-
“ ly spread through the whole Roman em-
“ pire their sense of the matter; which, be-
“ ing supported by so great authority, and
“ displayed by all the force of reason and
“ eloquence, had entirely opened the eyes
“ of mankind.” I shall beg leave to remark
another instance of good policy in him. He
attempted not to gain the veneration of the
multitude by opposing, but by adopting their
religious prejudices. His whole plan of de-
ceit was founded in the established supersti-
tion. The author himself will acknowledge,
it would have been extreme folly in him to
have acted otherwise: and all the world, I
believe, will agree in thinking, that, in that
case, he could not have had the smallest pro-
bability of success. What were the mira-
cles he wrought? I know of none, unless we
will dignify with that name, some feats of
legerdemain, performed mostly by candle-
light; which, in many parts of Europe, we
may daily see equalled, nay far exceeded, by
those of modern jugglers. Add to these

some oracles he pronounced, concerning which, if we may form a judgment from the account and specimen given us by Lucian, we should conclude, that, like other Heathen oracles, they were generally unintelligible, equivocal, or false. Before whom did he exhibit his wonders? Before none, if he could help it, that were not thorough believers in the popular system. His nocturnal mysteries were always introduced with an AVAUNT to *Atheists, Christians, and Epicureans*: and indeed it was dangerous for any such to be present at them. Mr. Hume says, that "from his ignorant Paphlagonians, he " was enabled to proceed to the inlisting of " votaries among the Grecian philosophers." On what authority he advances this, I have not been able to discover. He adds, " and " men of the most eminent rank and distinction in Rome." Lucian mentions one man of rank, Rutilianus, among the votaries of the prophet; an honest man he calls him, but at the same time the weakest, the most superstitious that ever lived. As to the military expedition, which one would imagine from Mr. Hume's expression, the Emperor had resolved on, in consequence of the encouragement which the delusive prophecies

of this impostor gave him, we find, on the contrary, it was undertaken before those prophecies were uttered. But further, Did Alexander risk any thing in assuming the character of the *interpreter* of Esculapius? Did he lose, or did he suffer any thing in defence of it? Quite the reverse. He enriched himself by this most ingenious occupation. I shall say nothing of the picture which Lucian gives of his morals, of the many artifices which he used, or of the atrocious crimes which he perpetrated. It must be owned, that the principal scope for calumny and detraction is in what concerns the private life and moral character. Lucian was an enemy, and, by his own account, had received the highest provocation. But I avoid every thing, on this topic, that can admit a question.

Where, I would gladly know, lies the resemblance between this impostor and the first publishers of the gospel? Every one, on the most superficial review, may discover, that, in all the material circumstances, they are perfect contrasts. There appears not, therefore, to be great danger in the poignant remark with which the author concludes this relation: " Though *much to be wished*, it does

“ not always happen, that every *Alexander*
“ meets with a *Lucian*, ready to expose and
“ detect his impostures.” Lest the full im-
port of this emphatical clause should not be
apprehended, the author hath been still more
explicit in the note: “ It may here perhaps
“ be objected, that I proceed rashly, and
“ form my notions of Alexander, merely
“ from the account given of him by Lucian,
“ a professed enemy. *It were indeed to be*
“ *wished*, that some of the accounts publish-
“ ed by his followers and accomplices had
“ remained. The opposition and contrast
“ betwixt the character and conduct of the
“ same man, as drawn by a friend or an ene-
“ my, is as strong, even in common life,
“ much more in these religious matters, as
“ that betwixt any two men in the world,
“ betwixt Alexander and St. Paul for in-
“ stance.” Who can forbear to lament the
uncommon distress of an author, obliged
every moment to recur to unavailing wishes?
Mr. Hume, however, in this calamitous si-
tuation, solaceth himself, as well as he can,
by supposing what he cannot assert. He
supposeth what would have been the case;
if his wishes could have been gratified; and
artfully insinuates, in this manner, to his

readers, that if we had the character and conduct of the apostle, delineated by as able an enemy as Lucian, we should find the portrait as ugly as that of Alexander.

Let us then for once suppose, what the author so ardently wishes, that such an enemy had undertaken the history of Paul of Tarsus. I can easily conceive what a different representation we should, in that case, have had, of the mental endowments and moral disposition, as well as of the inducements and views of this Christian missionary. I can conceive also, that both his actions and discourses might have been strangely disfigured. But if the biographer had maintained any regard, I say not, to truth, but to probability; there are some things, we may be absolutely certain, he would never have advanced. He would not surely have said of Paul, that he was by profession a cunning man, or *conjurer*; one who, for a little money, either told people their fortunes, or taught them how to recover stolen goods. He would not, I suppose, have pretended, that wherever the apostle went, he flattered the superstition of the populace, in order to gain them, and founded all his pretensions on the popular system. He would

not have alleged, that Paul *enriched* himself, or that he could never have the prospect of enriching himself, by his vocation ; nay, or that he risked nothing, or suffered nothing, by it. He could not have said concerning him, that he *declined* the audience or scrutiny of men, whose opinions in religion differed from those on which his mission was founded. He durst not have imputed to him the *wise policy* of laying the scene of his impostures, only where ignorance, barbarism, and stupidity prevailed : as it is unquestionable, that our apostle traversed great part, not only of Asia Minor, but of Macedonia, and Achaia ; fixed his residence eighteen months at Corinth, a city not less celebrated for the polite arts, than for its populousness and riches, preached publicly at Athens, before the Stoics and the Epicureans, and even before the Areopagus, the most venerable judicature in Greece ; not afraid of what the philosophers of that renowned mart of learning, might spread through the whole Roman empire, concerning him and his doctrine ; nay, and lastly, preached at Rome itself, the mistress and metropolis of the world.

The reader will observe, that, in this com-

parison, I have shunned every thing that is of a private, and therefore of a dubious nature. The whole is founded on such actions and events as were notorious : which it is not in the power of contemporary historians to falsify ; such with regard to Alexander, as a *votary* could not have dissembled ; such with regard to Paul, as an *enemy* durst not have denied. We are truly indebted to the essayist, who, intending to exhibit a *rival* to the apostle, hath produced a character which, we find on making the comparison, serves only for a foil. Truth never shines with greater lustre, than when confronted with falsehood. The evidence of our religion, how strong soever, appears not so irresistible, considered by itself, as when by comparison we perceive, that none of those artifices and circumstances attended its propagation, which the whole course of experience shows to be necessary to render imposture successful.

THE next topic on which the ingenious author hath bestowed some flourishes, is the miracle " which Tacitus reports of Vespasian, who cured a blind man in Alexandria, by means of his spittle, and a lame

‘ man by the mere touch of his foot, in
“ obedience to a vision of the god Serapis,
“ who had enjoined them to have recourse
“ to the emperor, for these miraculous and
“ extraordinary cures*.” The story he in-
troduces with informing us, that it is “ one
“ of the best attested miracles in all pro-
“ fane history.” If so, it will the better serve
for a sample of what may be expected from
that quarter. “ Every circumstance,” he
tells us, “ seems to add weight to the testi-
“ mony, and might be displayed at large,
“ with all the force of argument and elo-
“ quence if any one were now concerned
“ to enforce the evidence of that exploded
“ and idolatrous superstition.” For my part,
were I concerned to enforce the evidence
of that exploded and idolatrous superstition,
I should not wish the story were in better
hands than in the author’s. He is by no
means deficient in eloquence; and if some-
times there appear a deficiency in argu-
ment, that is not imputable to him, but to
the subject, which cannot furnish him with
any better; and though I do not suspect
him to be in the least concerned to re-esta-
blish Paganism, yet it is well known, that

* P. 192, &c.

hatred to his adversary may as strongly animate an advocate to exert himself, as affection to his client.

But to proceed to the story: First, the author pleads "the gravity, solidity, age, and probity of so great an emperor, who, through the whole course of his life, conversed in a familiar way with his friends and courtiers, and never affected those extraordinary airs of divinity assumed by Alexander and Demetrius." To this character, the justness of which I intend not to controvert, I shall beg leave to add, what is equally indubitable, and much to the purpose, that no emperor showed a stronger inclination to corroborate his title by the sanction of the gods, than the prince of whom he is speaking. This, doubtless, he thought the more necessary in his case, as he was of an obscure family, and nowise related to any of his predecessors. How fond he was of pleading *visions*, and *presages*, and *auguries*, in his favour, all the world knows*.

The author adds. "The historian, a con-

* Auctoritas, et quasi majestas quædam, ut scilicet inopinato et adhuc novo principi deërat, hæc quoque accessit. SÆTON.

“ temporary writer, noted for candour and
“ veracity, and withal the greatest and most
“ penetrating genius perhaps of all anti-
“ quity, and so free from any tendency to
“ superstition and credulity, that he even
“ lies under the contrary imputation of a-
“ theism and profaneness.” This would say
a great deal, if the character of the histo-
rian were of any moment in the question.
Doth Tacitus pretend that he was himself
a witness of the miracle? No. Doth he
mention it as a thing which he believes?
No. In either case, I acknowledge, that
the reputation of the *relater* for candour
and penetration, must have added weight to
the relation, whether considered as his *testi-*
mony, or barely as his *opinion*. But is it fair
to plead the veracity of the writer in proof
of every popular rumour mentioned by him?
His veracity is only concerned to satisfy us,
that it was actually reported, as he relates;
or that the attempt was made, and the mi-
racle pretended; a point which, I presume,
nobody would have disputed, although the
authority had been less than that of Ta-
citus. Indeed the historian doth not say
directly, whether he believes the miracle
or not; but, by his manner of telling it,

he plainly insinuates, that he thought it ridiculous. In introducing it, he intimates the utility of such reports to the emperor's cause. "By which," says he, "the favour of Heaven, and the appointment of the gods, might be urged in support of his title *." When he names the god *Serapis*, as warning the blind man to recur to Vespasian, he adds, in evident contempt and derision of his godship, "Who is adored above all others by the *Egyptians*, a people addicted to superstition †." Again he speaks of the Emperor, as induced to hope for success, by the persuasive tongues of flatterers ‡. A serious believer of the miracle would hardly have used such a style in relating it. But to what purpose did he then relate it? The answer is easy. Nothing could be more characteristic of the *Emperor*, or could better show the arts he had recourse to, and the hold which flattery had of him; nothing could be more characteristic of the *Alexandrians*, the people

* *Quæis cœlestis favor, et quædam in Vespasianum inclinatio numinum ostenderetur.*

† *Quem dedita superstitionibus gens ante alios colit.*

‡ *Vocibus adulantium in spem induci.*

amongst whom the miracle is said to have been wrought.

“ The persons,” says the essayist, “ from
 “ whose testimony he related the miracle,
 “ of established character for judgment and
 “ veracity, *as we may well suppose* ; eye-
 “ witnesses of the fact, and confirming their
 “ verdict, after the Flavian family were de-
 “ spoiled of the empire, and could no long-
 “ er give any reward as the price of a lie.”
 Persons of *established character for judgment
 and veracity* ! Who told Mr. Hume so ? It
 was not Tacitus. He only denominates them
 in general * : “ They who were present,”
 and “ a crowd of bystanders.” The author,
 conscious that he advances this without even
 the shadow of authority, hath subjoined, in
 order to palliate the matter, *as we may well
 suppose*. An admirable expedient for sup-
 plying a weak plea, with those convenient
 circumstances that can give it strength !
 When fact fails, which is not seldom the
 case, we need but apply to supposition,
 whose help is always near. But if this be
 allowed to take the place of argument, I see
 no reason why I may not avail myself of the
 privilege of supposing, as well as the author.

* Qui interfuerunt, — Quæ astabat multitudo.

The witnesses then, I will suppose, were mostly an ignorant rabble : but I wrong my cause ; I have a better foundation than supposal, having Tacitus himself, and all antiquity on my side, when I add, deeply immersed in *superstition*, particularly attached to the worship of *Serapis*, and keenly engaged in support of *Vespasian*, ALEXANDRIA having been the first city of note that publicly declared for him. Was it then matter of surprise, that a story, which at once soothed the superstition of the populace, and favoured their political schemes, should gain ground among them ? Can we justly wonder, that the wiser few, who were not deceived, should connive at, or even contribute to promote a deceit, which was highly useful to the cause wherein themselves were embarked, and at the same time highly grateful to the many ? Lastly, can we be surprised that any, who, for seven and twenty years, had, from motives of interest, and ambition, and popularity, propagated a falsehood, should not afterwards be willing to expose themselves as liars ?

The author finishes the story thus : “ To which if we add the public nature of the facts related, it will appear, that no evi-

“ dence can well be supposed stronger for
 “ so gross and so palpable a falsehood.” As
 to the nature of the facts, we are told by
 Tacitus, that when Vespasian consulted the
 physicians, whether such maladies were cu-
 rable by human art, they declared *, that
 “ in the one the power of sight was not ex-
 “ tinct, but would return, were the obstacles
 “ removed ; that in the other, the joints had
 “ suffered some dislocation, which by a sa-
 “ lutory pressure might be redressed.” From
 this account we are naturally led to con-
 clude, that the disorders were not so con-
 spicuous, but that either they might have
 been feigned, where they were not ; or that
 cures might have been pretended, where
 none were performed. I think it is even
 a further presumption of the truth of this
 conclusion, that Suetonius, the only other
 Roman historian who mentions the miracle
 (I know not how he hath been overlooked
 by Mr. Hume), differs from Tacitus, in the
 account he gives of the lameness. The one
 represents it as being in the hand, the other,
 as in the leg †.

* Huic non exesam vim lumen, et redituram, si
 pellerentur obstantia: illi elapsos in pravum artus, si
 salubris vis adhi eatur, posse integrari.

† Manum æger. TACITUS. Debili crure. SUE-

There are other circumstances regarding this story, on which I might make some remarks; but shall forbear, as it is impossible to enter into a minute discussion of particulars, that appear but trivial, when considered severally, without growing tiresome to the bulk of readers. I shall therefore only subjoin these simple questions. *First*, What emperor or other potentate was flattered in his dignity and pretensions by the miracles of our Lord? What eminent personage found himself interested to support, by his authority and influence, the credit of these miracles? *Again*, What popular superstition or general and rooted prejudices were they calculated to confirm? These two circumstances, were there no other, make the greatest odds imaginable betwixt the miracles of VESPASIAN and those of JESUS CHRIST.

So much for the PAGAN miracles mentioned by the author.

TONIUS. Mr. Hume, in the last edition of the *Essay*, mentions Suetonius, but takes no notice of this difference between his account and that of Tacitus.

H

SECT. V.

Examination of the POPISH miracles mentioned by Mr. Hume.

THE author soon descends from ancient to modern times, and leaving *Paganism*, recurs to *Popery*, a much more fruitful source of lying wonders.

THE first of this kind he takes notice of*, is a Spanish miracle recorded in the memoirs of Cardinal *de Retz*. The story, he says, is very memorable, and may well deserve our consideration. “ When that intriguing politician fled into Spain, to avoid the persecution of his enemies, he passed through Saragossa, the capital of Arragon ; where he was shown in the cathedral church, a man, who had served twenty years as a door-keeper of the church, and was well known to every body in town, that had ever paid their devotions at that cathedral. He had been for so long a time wanting a leg ; but recovered that limb, by the rubbing of holy oil upon the stump ; and, when the cardinal examined it, he found

* P. 193. &c.

"it to be a true natural leg, like the other."

Would not any person imagine, from the last words of the sentence, that the cardinal had ordered the man to put off his shoes and stockings, that, by touch as well as by sight, he might be satisfied, there was no artifice used, but that both his legs consisted of genuine flesh and bone? Yet the truth is, his Eminency did not think it worth while to examine any one circumstance of this wonderful narration, but contented himself with reporting it precisely as it had been told him. His words literally translated are, "In that church they showed me a man, whose business it was to light the lamps, of which they have a prodigious number, telling me, that he had been seen seven years at the gate, with one leg only. I saw him there with two*." Not one word of trial or examination, or even so much as a single question asked on the subject; not a syllable of his finding the leg to be either true or false, natural or artificial, like the other or

* L'on m'y montra un homme, qui servioit à allumer les lampes, qui y font en nombre prodigieux; et l'on me dit, qu'on l'y avoit vu sept ans à la porte de cette eglise, avec une seule jambe. Je l'y vis avec deux. Liv. 4. l'an 1654.

unlike. I have a better opinion both of the candour and of the good sense of Mr. Hume, than to imagine, he would have designedly misrepresented this story, in order to render it fitter for his purpose. I believe the source of this error hath been solely the trusting to his memory in the relation which he gave, and not taking the trouble to consult the passage in the memoirs. This conjecture appears the more probable, as he hath made some other alterations, which are nowise conducive to his design; such as, that the man had been seen in the church *twenty* years wanting a leg, and that he was a *door-keeper*; whereas the memoir-writer says only *seven* years, and that he was one *who lighted the lamps* *.

" This miracle was vouched," says the author, " by all the canons of the church; " and the whole company in town were appealed to, for a confirmation of the fact,

* Since finishing this tract, I have seen an edition of Mr. Hume's essays, &c. later than that here referred to. It is printed at London 1760. I must do the author the justice to observe, that, in this edition, he hath corrected the mistake, as to the cardinal's examining the man's leg, of which he only says, " The cardinal assures us, that he saw him with two legs." He still calls him a *door-keeper*, and says, that he had served *twenty* years in this capacity.

"whom the cardinal found, by their zealous devotion, to be thorough believers of the miracle." It is true, that the company in town were appealed to, by those ecclesiastics; but it is also true, that *De Retz*, by his own account, seems not to have asked any man a question on the subject. He acknowledges indeed, that an anniversary festival, instituted in commemoration of the miracle, was celebrated by a vast concourse of people of all ranks.

"Here," continues the essayist, "the relationer was also contemporary to the supposed prodigy, of an incredulous and libertine character, as well as of great genius." But of what weight, in this affair, is either the genius or the incredulity of the relater, since, by Mr. Hume's confession, he had no faith in the relation? Strange indeed is the use which the essayist makes of this circumstance. What *adds mightily*," says he, "to the force of the evidence, and may double our surprise on this occasion, is, that the cardinal himself, who relates the story, seems not to give any credit to it." It doth not in the least surprise me, that the cardinal gives no credit to this relation; but I am beyond measure surprised, that Mr. Hume should repre-

fent this circumstance as *adding mightily* to the force of the evidence. Is then a story which is reported by a man of genius, the more credible that he doth not believe it? Or, Is it the more incredible that he doth believe it? What would the author have said, if the cardinal had told us, that he gave credit to the relation? Might he not, in that case, have very pertinently pleaded the great genius, and penetration, and incredulity of the relater, as *adding mightily* to the force of the evidence? On that hypothesis, he surely might, for pretty obvious reasons. Uncommon penetration qualifies a man for detecting fraud; and it requires evidence greater than ordinary to surmount incredulity. The belief, therefore, of such a person as the cardinal, who had not only the means of discovering an imposture, as he was contemporary and on the spot, but the ability to discover it, as he was a man of genius, and not over-credulous; his belief, I say, would evidently have been no small presumption of the truth of the miracle. How his disbelief can be in like manner a presumption of its truth, is to me incomprehensible. Ay but, rejoins the author, "as he seems not to give
" any credit to it, he cannot be suspected of

"any concurrence in the holy fraud." Very well. I am satisfied that a man's TESTIMONY is the *more* to be regarded, that he is above being suspected of concurring in *any fraud*, call it holy or unholy. But I want to know why, on the very same account, his OPINION is *the less* to be regarded. For my part, I find no difficulty in believing every article of the narration for which the cardinal gives his testimony: notwithstanding this, I may be of the same opinion with him; that the account given by the dean and canons, which is their testimony, not his, was all a fiction. But it is not with the cardinal's *testimony* we are here concerned: about that there is no dispute. It is with his *opinion*. Are then a man's sentiments about a matter of fact, I must insist on it, the less worthy of regard, either because he is a man of genius, and not at all credulous, or because he cannot be suspected of any concurrence in a holy fraud? Are they the more improbable on these accounts? The essayist, when he reflects, will be the last man in the world, that would assist in establishing a maxim so unfavourable, not only to candour, but even to genius and scepticism: and indeed there are few, if any.

that would be greater sufferers by it than himself.

But leaving this, as one of the unfathomable depths of the essay, I proceed to the other circumstances. "The miracle," says the author, "of so singular a nature, as could *scarce* admit of a counterfeit." He did well at least to use the word *scarce*; for if every visitant was as little desirous of prying into the secret, as the cardinal, nothing could be more easily counterfeited: "And the witnesses very numerous, and all of them, *in a manner*, spectators of the fact, to which they gave their testimony." By the *very numerous witnesses*, I suppose he means the whole company in town, who were appealed to. They were all, *in a manner*, spectators of the fact. What precise abatement the author intended we should make, from the sense of the word *spectators*, on account of the qualifying phrase *in a manner*, I shall not presume to determine; but shall observe, from the memoirs, that it was not so much as pretended by the canons, that any of the citizens had seen the miracle performed; it was only pretended, that they had seen the man formerly at the gate of the church, wanting a leg. Nor is it al-

leged, that any of them was at more pains in examining the matter, either before or after the recovery of the leg, than the cardinal was. They were therefore properly no spectators of the fact. The phrase, *in a manner*, ought, I imagine, to have been placed in the end of the sentence, which would have run thus: "to which they, *in a manner*, gave their testimony:" for no direct testimony was either asked of them, or given by them; their belief is inferred from their devotion.

I have been the more particular in my remarks on the circumstances of this story, not because there was need of these remarks; for, though to the essayist the relation appeared very *memorable*, to me, and, I believe, to most people, it appears very *trifling*; but that the reader might have this further specimen of the author's talents in embellishing. To the above-mentioned, and all other such idle tales, this short and simple answer will, by every man of sense, be thought sufficient. *The country where the miracle is said to have been wrought, is SPAIN; the people who propagated the faith of it, were THE CLERGY.* What comparison, in point of credibility, can be made between miracles, which, with no visible sup-

port but their own evidence, had at once to encounter, and did in fact overcome the abhorrence of the priest, and the tyranny of the magistrate, the insolence of the learned, and the bigotry of the superstitious : what comparison, I say, can be made between such, and any prodigies said to have been performed in a country, where all the powers of the nation, secular and ecclesiastical, the literature of the schools, such as it is, and the prejudices of the people, conspire in establishing their credit ; a country sunk in the most obdurate superstition that ever disgraced human nature *, a country where the awe of the in-

* This perhaps will appear to some to be too severe a censure on a country called Christian, and may be thought to reflect on Christianity itself. I do not think it fairly capable of such a construction. That the corruption of the best things produces the worst, hath grown into a proverb ; and, on the most impartial inquiry, I do not imagine it will be found, that any species of idolatry ever tended so directly to extirpate humanity, gratitude, natural affection, equity, mutual confidence, good faith, and every amiable and generous principle from the human breast, as that gross perversion of the Christian religion which is established in Spain. It might easily be shown, that the human sacrifices offered by Heathens, had not half the tendency to corrupt the heart, and consequently deserve not to be viewed with half the horror, as those celebrated a-

quisition is so great, that no person, whatever be his sentiments, dares mutter a syllable against any opinion that hath obtained the patronage of their spiritual guides? But that I may not be accused of prepossession, or suspected of exaggerating, I shall only give the sentiments of two eminent foreigners (who were not Protestants, and may therefore be supposed the more impartial) concerning that nation, and the influence which the holy tribunal has both on their character and manners. Voltaire *, speaking of the inquisition as established in Spain, says, “ Their form of
 “ proceeding is an infallible way to destroy
 “ whomsoever the inquisitors please. The
 “ prisoners are not confronted with the in-

among the Spaniards, with so much pomp, and barbarous festivity, at an *auto da fe*. It will not surely be affirmed, that our Saviour reflected on the Mosaic institution, or genuine Judaism, when he said, *Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, YE MAKE him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.* Yet the words plainly imply, that even Pagans, by being converted to the *Judaism* that was then professed, were *made* children of hell, and consequently corrupted, instead of being reformed. See Matth. xxiii. 15.

* Essai sur l'Histoire Générale, chap. 118.

“formers; and there is no informer who is
“not listened to. A public criminal, an in-
“famous person, a child, a prostitute, are
“creditable accusers. Even the son may de-
“pose against his father; the wife against
“her husband. In fine, the prisoner is com-
“pelled to inform against himself, to divine,
“and to confess, the crime laid to his charge;
“of which often he is ignorant. This proce-
“dure, unheard of till the institution of this
“court, makes the whole kingdom tremble.
“Suspicion reigns in every breast. Friendship
“and openness are at an end. The brother
“dreads his brother, the father his son.
“Hence taciturnity is become the character-
“istic of a nation endued with all the vivacity
“natural to the inhabitants of a warm and
“fruitful climate. To this tribunal we must
“likewise impute that profound ignorance of
“sound philosophy, in which Spain lies bu-
“ried, whilst Germany, England, France,
“and even Italy, have discovered so many
“truths, and enlarged the sphere of our
“knowledge. Never is human nature so de-
“based, as when ignorance is armed with
“power.” “It is necessary,” says Montef-
quieu *, in the humble remonstrance to the

* De l'Esprit des Loix, liv. 25. chap. 13.

inquisitors of Spain and Portugal, “ that we
“ advertise you of one thing ; it is, that if
“ any person, in future times, shall dare as-
“ sert, that, in the age wherein we live, the
“ Europeans were civilized, you will be
“ quoted to prove that they were barbari-
“ ans, and the idea people will form of you,
“ will be such as will dishonour your age,
“ and bring hatred on all your contempo-
“ raries.”

I COME now to consider the miracles said to have been performed in the churchyard of St. Medard, at the tomb of *Abbé* Paris. On these the author hath expatiated with great parade, exulting, that he hath found in them, as he imagines, what, in respect of number, and nature, and evidence, may outvie the miracles of holy writ. Yet should we admit them to be true, how they can be considered as proofs of any doctrine, or how they can affect the evidence of the miracles recorded in scripture, it will not perhaps be easy to discover. But setting that question aside, I propose to examine their evidence ; and that, not by entering into a particular inquiry concerning each separate fact mentioned in Montgeron's collection, as such an

inquiry would appear, to every judicious reader, both tedious and impertinent; but by making a few general observations, founded in unquestionable fact, and mostly supported even by the authority of Montgeron, that doughty champion of the Jansenist saint*.

First, Let it be remarked, that it was often objected by the enemies of the saint, and scarce contradicted, never confuted, by his friends, that the prostrations at his sepulchre *produced* more diseases than they *cured*. The ingenious author lately quoted, in the account he gives of the affairs of the church in the ninth century, taking occasion incidentally to mention the miracles of the *Abbé*, speaks of this circumstance as a thing universally known, and undeniable†. “I should not take notice,” says he, “of an epidemical folly with which the people of Dijon were seized in 844, occasioned by one Saint Benignus, who

* The character of his book is very justly and very briefly expressed in *Le siècle de Louis XIV.*, in these words: “Si ce livre subsistait un jour, et que les autres fussent perdus, la postérité croirait que notre siècle a été un tems de barbarie,” *chap.* 33.

† *Essai sur l'Histoire Générale*, chap. 21.

“ threw those into convulsions who prayed
 “ on his tomb ; I should not, I say, men-
 “ tion this popular superstition, had it not
 “ been furiously revived in our days, in pa-
 “ rallel circumstances. It seems, as if the
 “ same follies were destined to make their
 “ appearance, from time to time, on the
 “ theatre of the world : but good sense is
 “ also the same at all times ; and nothing
 “ so judicious hath been said, concerning
 “ the modern miracles wrought on the tomb
 “ of I know not what deacon at Paris, as
 “ what a bishop of Lyons said, concerning
 “ those of Dijon. *A strange saint indeed,*
 “ *that maims those who pay their devoirs to*
 “ *him. I should think, miracles ought to be*
 “ *performed for the curing, and not for the in-*
 “ *flicting of maladies.”*

The *second* observation is, That the in-
 stances of persons cured are extremely *few*,
 compared with the multitudes of people in
 distress, who night and day attended the
 sepulchre, imploring in vain the intercession
 of the saint. The crowds of sick and infirm,
 who flocked to the tomb for relief, were, by
 all accounts, innumerable : whereas all the
 cures which the zealous and indefatigable
 Montgeron could procure vouchers of, a-

mounted only to NINE *. The author, therefore, must be understood, as speaking with great latitude, when he says, "There
" surely never was so great a number of
" miracles ascribed to one person, as those
" which were lately said to have been wrought
" in France, upon the tomb of *Abbé* Paris,
" the famous Jansenist, with whose sanctity
" the people were so long deluded †." If
thousands of diseased persons had applied for
medicine to some ignorant quack, in the as-
surance of his extraordinary abilities; would
it be matter of surprise to a reasonable man,
that, of so many, *eight* or *nine* should be
found, whose distempers had taken a favour-
able turn, whilst they were using his specifics,
and had thereby given countenance to the
delusion? I think it would be matter of sur-
prise that there were so few.

* It must be owned that the author of the *Recueil* after mentioned, hath presented us with a much greater number; but let it be remarked, that that author doth not confine himself to the cures performed openly at the tomb of the *deacon*; he gives us also those that were wrought in the private chambers of the sick, by virtue of his relics, by images of him, or by earth brought from under his monument. Nor is the collection restricted only to the cures effected by the saint; it includes also the judgments inflicted by him.

† P. 195.

I shall observe, *thirdly*, That *imposture* was actually detected, and proved in several instances. That the reader may be satisfied of this, I must entreat him to have recourse to the Archbishop of Sens' *Pastoral Instruction*; a book which Mr. Hume could not, with propriety, take any notice of, having positively asserted, that "the enemies to those opinions, "in whose favour the miracles were said to "have been wrought, were neverable distinctly to refute or detect them *." This prelate, on the contrary, hath not only given a distinct refutation of some of these pretended miracles, but hath clearly detected the deceit and little artifices by which their credit was supported. I intend not to descend to particulars, and shall therefore only refer the reader to the book itself, and beg that he will peruse what relates to the cases of *Jacques Laurent Menedrieux*, *Jean Nivet*, *Sieur le Doulx*, *Laleu*, *Anne Coulon*, the widow *de Lorme*, as well as *Mademoiselle le Franc*, of whom the essayist hath made mention in a note. In this perusal, the reader will observe the shameful prevarications of some Jansenist witnesses, for whom Mr. Hume would fain apologize, by telling us pleasantly, they were

* P. 195.

tampered with *. I shall only add on this head, that the detection of fraud in some instances, justly brings suspicion on all the other instances. A man whom I know to have lied to me, on several occasions, I shall suspect, on every occasion, where I have not access to discover, whether what he affirms be true or false. It is in the same way we judge of the spirit and conduct of parties, as of individuals.

I observe, *fourthly*, That all the cures recorded by Montgeron, as duly attested, were such as might have been effected by *natural* means. There are two kinds of miracles, to which Mr. Hume hath alluded in a note, though he does not directly make the distinction. One is, when the event, considered by itself, is evidently *preternatural*. Of this kind are, raising the dead, walking on water, making whole the maimed; for by no natural causes can these effects be produced. The other kind is, when the event, considered by itself, is *natural*, that is, may be produced by natural causes, but is denominated miraculous, on account of the manner. That a sick person should be restored to health, is not, when considered singly, preternatural;

* P. 197. in the note.

but that health should be restored by the command of a man, undoubtedly is. Let us hear the author on this point: " Sometimes an event may not, *in itself*, seem to be contrary to the laws of nature, and yet, if it were real, it might, by reason of some circumstances, be denominated a miracle; because, *in fact*, it is contrary to these laws. Thus, if a person claiming a divine authority, should command a sick person to be well, a healthful man to fall down dead, the clouds to pour rain, the winds to blow, in short, should order many natural events, which immediately follow upon his command; these might justly be esteemed miracles, because they are really, in this case, contrary to the laws of nature. For if any suspicion remain, that the event and command concurred by accident, there is no miracle, and no transgression of the laws of nature. If this suspicion be removed, there is evidently a miracle, and a transgression of these laws; because nothing can be more contrary to nature, than that the voice or command of a man, should have such an influence *." From what hath been said, it appears, that these

* P. 181. in the note.

two kinds of miracles must differ considerably in respect of evidence, since the latter naturally gives room for a suspicion, which is absolutely excluded from the former. In the former, when the fact or event is proved, the miracle is unquestionable. In the latter, the fact may be proved, and yet the miracle may be justly questioned. It therefore merits our attention, that all the miracles recorded in Montgeron's collection, were of the second kind. One of the most considerable of those cures, was that of Don Alphonso de Palacios, who had lost one eye, and was distressed with an inflammation in the other. The inflamed eye was cured, but the lost eye was not restored. Had there been a reproduction of the member which had perished, a sufficient proof of the fact, would have been a sufficient proof of the miracle. But as the case was otherwise, the fact vouched may be admitted, without admitting any miracle. The cures said to have been performed on those patients who were afflicted with paralytic or dropfical disorders, or that performed on Louisa Coirin, who had a tumour on her breast, will not appear to be entitled to a rank in the first class. As little can the cure of Peter Gautier claim that honour. One of his eyes had been

pricked with an awl; in consequence of which the aqueous humour dropped out, and he became blind of that eye. His sight was restored, whilst he paid his addressee to the *Abbé*. But that a puncture in the cornea of the eye will often heal of itself, and that the aqueous humour, after it hath been quite lost, will be recruited, and consequently, that the faculty of vision will, in such a case, be recovered, is what every oculist can assure us of. The loss of the watery humour, is the constant effect of a very common operation in surgery, couching the cataract. Hence we may learn, how we ought to understand these words of the author, "The curing of the
" sick, giving hearing to the deaf, and sight
" to the blind, were every where talked of,
" as the usual effects of that holy sepulchre *." As therefore the alleged miracles were all of the second class, it is only from the attendant circumstances we can judge, whether the facts, though acknowledged, were miraculous or not.

In order to enlighten us on this point, I observe, *fifthly*, That *none* of the cures were *instantaneous*. We have not indeed the same hold of the deceased *Abbé*, as of a living pro-

phet, who pretends to work miracles. Those who attend the latter, can know exactly, to whom he grants the benefit of his miraculous aid. They can judge also, whether the suppliant's recovery be coincident, with the prophet's volition or command. In the former case, we have not access to judge of either; and consequently, there is much greater scope for fancy and credulity to operate. No voice was ever said to have proceeded from the tomb of the blessed deacon, as his votaries styled him. They obtained no audible answer to their prayers. There are, however, some circumstances, by which a probable conjecture may be made concerning the efficiency of the saint in the cures ascribed to him. One is, if the cure instantaneously followed the first devotions at the tomb. Supernatural cures differ, in this particular, as much as in any other, from those which are effected by natural means, that they are not *gradually*, but *instantly*, perfected. Now, of which kind were the cures of St. Medard? From the accounts that are given, it is evident, that they were *gradual*. That some of them were *sudden*, is alleged; but that any of them were *instantaneous*, or immediately followed the first application, is not even pretended. All

the worshippers at the tomb, persisted for *days*, several of them for *weeks*, and some for *months* successively, daily imploring the intercession of the *Abbé*, before they received relief from their complaints; and the relief which was received, is, in most cases, acknowledged to have been gradual.

I observe, *sixthly*, That most of the devotees either had been using *medicines* before, and continued to use them, during their applications to the saint; or, that their distempers had *abated*, before they determined to solicit his help. That the Spanish youth had been using, all the while, a medicine prescribed by an eminent oculist, was proved by the depositions of witnesses; that Gautier had begun to recover his sight, before he had recourse to the sepulchre, was attested, not only by his uncle, but even by himself, when, as the Archbishop of Sens informs us, he signed a recantation of what he had formerly advanced. With regard to the rest, it appears at least probable, from the circumstances of the proof, that they were using the prescriptions of the physicians, whom they had consulted before applying to the deacon, and who were afterwards required to give their

testimony, concerning the nature and malignancy of the different diseases.

The *seventh* observation is, That some of the cures attested were *incomplete*. This was manifestly the case of the Spaniard, who was relieved only from the most inconsiderable part of his complaint. Even the cure of *Mademoiselle* Thibault, which was as great a subject of exultation to the partisans of the *Abbé* as any other, was not complete. Not only was she confined to her bed, for many days, after the decrease of her dropsy ; but she still remained incapable of moving two of her fingers. Silva, physician to the Duke of Orleans, attested this ; adding expressly, that he *could not look on her as being cured*.

The *eighth* and last observation I shall make on this subject, is, That the relief granted some of them was but *temporary*. This was clearly proved to be the case of the Spanish gentleman. That soon after his return home, he relapsed into his former malady, the prelate I have often quoted, hath, by the certificates and letters which he procured from Madrid, put beyond controversy. Among these, there are letters from a Spanish grandee, Don Francis Xavi-

er, and from the patient's uncle, besides a certificate signed by himself.

After the above observations, I believe, there will be no occasion for saying much on this subject. The author has, in a note, artfully enough pointed out his aim, that it might not be overlooked by the careless reader *. "There is another book," says he, "in three volumes (called *Recueil des miracles de l'Abbé Paris*), giving an account of many of these miracles, and accompanied with prefatory discourses, which are very well wrote †." He adds, "There

* P. 196.

† I am surpris'd that Mr. Hume hath taken no notice of the profound erudition displayed in the *Recueil*, as I imagine its author is much more eminent for this, than for his talent in writing. Besides, his learning deserves our regard the more, that it is of a kind rarely to be met with in the present century. Where shall we find in these dregs of the ages, to adopt his own emphatical expression, such an extensive knowledge, as he hath exhibited, of all the monkish and legendary writings of the darkest and most barbarous, or, according to him, the most devout ages of the church? Or whence else, but from those productions, could he have selected such admirable materials for his work? The lives and writings of the saints are an inexhaustible treasure for a performance of this kind. It is true, St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John, have said

“ runs, however, through the whole of these,
“ a ridiculous comparison betwixt the mi-

little to his purpose, and he makes as little use of them. But is not this want richly supplied in St. Cudbert, St. Edildride, St. Willibrord, St. Baudri, and five hundred others of equal note? One thing, however, I would gladly be informed of, being utterly at a loss to account for it. What entitled this author, who seems not to be deficient in a veneration truly catholic for ignorance, superstition, and barbarism, to speak contemptibly of Capgravius, Colganus, and Jacobus de Voragine, author of *The Golden Legend*? To be plain with him, this is a freedom which doth not at all become him: for of *the few* readers in this age, who happen to be acquainted with the authorities quoted in the *Recueil*, most, if not all, will, I am afraid, be of opinion, that the writers last mentioned are fully as credible, not less famous, and much more ingenious, than many of those to whom he is so greatly indebted for his most extraordinary narrative. Was it for him then to scandalize *these few*? It is pity that a writer of such uncommon reading and application, should act so inconsistently, and undermine his own cause. But passing his literature, which is unquestionable, I shall give the reader a specimen of his talent in disputation. To the objection that had been made, that the miracles of the deacon were gradual, he replies, “ So was *the creation*, “ the first of miracles; which employed no less than “ six days.” As all that was done in that time, is comprehended under *one name*, THE CREATION, he concludes very sagely, that it ought to be denominated *one miracle*. A writer of this stamp would no doubt de-

“ racles of our Saviour and those of the
 “ *Abbé*; wherein it is asserted, that the e-

spise the answer which an ordinary reader might make him,—*first*, That every single production was a perfect miracle,—*secondly*, That nothing could be more instantaneous than those productions, *God said, Let there be light, and there was light, &c.*—and, *lastly*, That the world was not created by the ministration of man, nor in the presence of men, nor in order to serve as evidence of any doctrine. I must be forgiven to remark, that in the whole of this author's reply, he hath unfortunately mistaken the meaning of the objectors, who intend not to say, that God may not perform a miracle gradually, but that what is so performed, hath not the same evidence of its being miraculous, as what is done in an instant, and therefore cannot so well serve as evidence of any doctrine. Now that the miracles of Monsieur de Paris were intended as evidence of his doctrine, and consequently of that of the appellants from the bull *Unigenitus*, he every where vehemently maintains. Another specimen of this author's acuteness and ingenuity I shall give in a literal translation from his own words: “ But, it will be said, in the earliest times of the church, miraculous cures were commonly perfected in an instant. True; and it is this which confirms my doctrine. As it was ordinary then, to convert great sinners all of a sudden, it was also ordinary to cure the sick all of a sudden. But such wonders in both kinds are for the commencement of the church, or for the renovation promised her. In these days, which the French clergy have justly styled *the dregs of the ages*, it is much

“vidence for the latter is equal to that for
“the former*.” At first reading, one is
“that God convert many sinners, and cure many sick,
“by slow degrees, at the same time that he shows by
“some more shining examples, that his arm is not
“shortened.”

* I am sorry to be again so soon laid under the necessity of observing, that the essayist, by confiding too much in his memory, often injures the writers whom he quotes. It is but doing justice to the author of the *Recueil*, to observe, that he hath, in no part of his performance, asserted that the evidence for the miracles of Monsieur de Paris is equal to that for the miracles of Jesus Christ. Perhaps my reader will be surprised when I tell him, for I own I was exceedingly surprised when I discovered, that he hath not only in the plainest terms asserted, but strenuously maintained, the contrary. And for this purpose he hath employed no less than twelve pages of his work. He introduces the subject (Discourse 2. part 1.) with observing, that he and the rest of his party had been traduced by their adversaries, as equalling the miracles of the deacon to those of our Saviour. The impiety of such a comparison he even mentions with horror, and treats the charge as an absolute calumny. Hence he takes occasion to enumerate those peculiar circumstances in the miracles of our Lord, which gave them an eminent superiority, not only over those of his saint, but over those of every other saint, or prophet whatsoever. To this enumeration he subjoins, *Tous ceux qui recourent à Monsieur de Paris ne sont pas guéris, nous dit-on; plusieurs ne le sont qu'en partie, ou d'une manière lente, et moins*

apt, with surprise, to imagine, that the author is going to make some atonement for

éclatante ; il n'a point ressuscité de morts. Que s'enfuit-il de-la, sinon que les miracles que Dieu a opérés par lui sont inférieurs à ceux que nôtre Seigneur a opérés par lui-même ? Nous l'avouons, nous incolquons cette vérité. " All those, we are told, who recur to " Monsieur de Paris are not cured ; several are cured " but in part, or in a slow and less striking manner ; " he hath raised no dead. What follows, unless that " the miracles which God wrought by him, are inferior to those which our Lord wrought by himself ? " We acknowledge, we inculcate this truth." Afterwards, speaking of evidence, he owns also, that the miracles of the deacon are not equally certain with those of Jesus Christ. The latter, he says, are more certain in many respects. He specifies the natural notoriety of some of the facts, the public and instantaneous manner in which most of them were effected, the number, the quality, the constancy of the witnesses, and the forced acknowledgment of his most spiteful enemies. He concludes this subject in these memorable terms : Au reste ce que je viens d'exposer sur la supériorité des merveilles opérés par le Sauveur, je l'avois reconnu avec plaisir dans le premier discours. J'y ai dit en propres termes, qu'il y avoit *une difference infinie entre les miracles de Jesus Christ et ceux de Monsieur de Paris*. J'ai promis de ne jamais oublier cette difference, et j'ai tenu parole. J'ai remarqué, dans le lieu où il convenoit de le faire, que cette difference infinie regardoit l'*evidence* des prodiges aussi bien que leur *grandeur* ; et que les incredules pouvoient nous dire,

the tenets of the essay, by turning advocate for the miracles of Jesus Christ; and by showing, that these are not affected by his doctrine. But on this point we are not long

que ceux que nous produisions n'ont point le même éclat qu'ont eu ceux de nôtre Seigneur. " Finally, " what I have just now evinced on the superiority of " the wonders performed by our Lord, I had acknowledged with pleasure in the first discourse. I said " there, in express terms, that there was *an infinite difference between the miracles of Jesus Christ and those of Monsieur de Paris*. I promised never to forget " this difference, and I have kept my promise. I remarked in its proper place, that this infinite difference regarded the *evidence* as well as the *greatness* of " the prodigies; and that the incredulous might object, that those which we produce, have not the same " lustre with those of our Saviour." I have been the more particular on this point, not so much to vindicate the author of the *Recueil*, as to show the sense which even the most bigotted partizans of the holy deacon had of the difference between the miracles ascribed to him, and those performed by our Lord. I cannot avoid remarking also another difference, I mean that which appears between the sentiments of this author as expressed by himself, and his sentiments as reported by the essayist. It is indeed, Mr. Hume, a judicious observation you have given us; that we ought to " lend " a very academic faith to every report which favours " the passion of the reporter; in whatever way it strikes " in with his natural inclinations and propensities." p. 200.

held in suspense. He subjoins, "As, if the
" testimony of men could ever be put in the
" balance with that of God himself, who
" conducted the pen of the inspired writ-
" ers." An ingenious piece of raillery with-
out question. Is it possible, in a politer man-
ner, or in more obliging terms, to tell the
Christian world, *They are fools* ; and that all
who are silly enough to believe the miracles
recorded in scripture, are not entitled to be
argued with as men. How ? They are so
absurd as to believe the scriptures to be the
word of God, on the evidence of the mi-
racles wrought by our Lord and his apostles;
and that these miracles were wrought, they
could not believe on any testimony, less than
that of God, reporting them in the scrip-
tures; and thus, by making inspiration and
miracles reciprocally foundations to each o-
ther, they, in effect, admit both without any
foundation at all. After this handsome
compliment to the friends of holy writ, he
thinks himself at liberty to be very explicit
on the comparative evidence of the mi-
racles of the *Abbé*, and those of Jesus: "If
" these writers indeed were to be consider-
" ed merely as human testimony, the French
" author is *very moderate* in his comparifon;

“ since he might, *with some appearance of*
“ *reason*, pretend, that the Jansenist miracles
“ *much surpass* the other, in evidence and
“ authority.” Was ever so rough an assault
preceded by so smooth, but so insidious a
preamble? Is it then still the fate of Jesus
to be betrayed with a kiss? But notwith-
standing this author’s declaration, no Chris-
tian will have reason to dread the issue of
the comparison. Mr. Hume hath not en-
tered on particulars, neither shall I enter on
them. I should not incline to tire my
reader with repetitions, which, in a minute
inquiry, would be inevitable. I shall there-
fore only desire him, if he think it needful,
to peruse a second time the eight foregoing
observations. Let him try the miracles of
our Lord by this touch-stone; and I per-
suade myself, he will be satisfied, that there
is *no appearance of reason* to pretend, that
the Jansenist miracles *much surpass* the other,
or even equal them, in evidence and au-
thority.

The author triumphs not a little in the
observation, that the reports of the prodi-
gies performed by the deacon, were violent-
ly opposed by the civil magistrate, and by
the Jesuits, the most learned society in the

kingdom. He could see the importance of this circumstance in the case of *Abbé* Paris, though not in the case of Jesus Christ. But that the difference of the cases, as well as their resemblance, may better appear; it ought likewise to be observed, that Jansenism, though not the *ruling* faction, was at that time the *popular* faction; that this popularity was not the effect of the miracles of the *Abbé*, but antecedent to these miracles; that, on the contrary, the Jesuits were extremely *unpopular*; and that many, who had no more faith in the miracles of St. Medard than Mr. Hume hath, were well pleased to connive at a delusion, which at once plagued and mortified a body of men, that were become almost universally odious.

I shall only add, that nothing could more effectually expose the folly of those pretensions, than the expedient by which they were made to cease. In consequence of an order from the King, the sepulchre was enclosed with a wall, and the votaries were debarred from approaching the tomb. The author says in relation to this *, “No Jansenist was ever embarrassed to account for the cessation of the miracles, when the

* P. 198. in the note.

“ churchyard was shut up by the King’s “ edict.” Certain it is, that “ God is master “ of his own graces and works.” But it is equally certain, that neither reason nor the gospel leads us to think, that any human expedient will prove successful, which is calculated to frustrate the decrees of Heaven. Both, on the contrary, teach us, that men never more directly *promote* the designs of their maker, than when they intend directly to *oppose* them. It was not thus, that either Pharisees or Sadducees, Jews or Gentiles, succeeded in their opposition to the miracles of Jesus and his apostles. The opinion of Gamaliel * was undoubtedly judicious : *If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought ; but if it be of God, ye CANNOT overthrow it ; beware, therefore, lest ye be found fighting even against God.* To conclude, Did the Jansenist cause derive any advantage from those pretended miracles ? None at all. It even suffered by them. It is justly remarked by Voltaire †, that “ the tomb of the deacon Paris proved “ in effect, in the minds of all people of “ sense, the tomb of Jansenism.” How un-

* Acts v. 38, 39.

† Siecle de Louis XIV. chap. 33.

like in all respects the miracles recorded by the Evangelists!

Thus I have briefly inquired into the nature and evidence, first of the *Pagan*, and next of the *Popish* miracles, mentioned by Mr. Hume; and have, I hope, sufficiently evinced, that the miracles of the New Testament can suffer nothing by the comparison; that, on the contrary, as in painting, the shades serve to heighten the glow of the colours; and, in music, the discords to set off the sweetness of the harmony; so the value of these genuine miracles is enhanced by the contrast of those paltry counterfeits.

SECT. VI.

Abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence, that there have been miracles in former times; or such events as, when compared with the present constitution of the world, would by Mr. Hume be denominated miraculous.

I READILY concur with Mr. Hume, in maintaining, that when, merely by the force of REASON, we attempt to investigate the *origin of worlds**, we get beyond our sphere, and

* Essay 12. Of the academical or sceptical philosophy, part 3.

must infallibly bewilder ourselves in hypothesis and conjecture. REASON indeed (which vainly boasts her all-sufficiency), hath sometimes pretended to carry men to this amazing height. But there is ground to suspect, that, in such instances, the ascent of *reason*, as the author elegantly expresseth it †, hath been aided by the wings of *imagination*. If we will not be indebted to REVELATION for our knowledge of this article, we must, for aught I can perceive, be satisfied to live in ignorance. There is, however, one question distinct from the former, though a-kin to it, which, even from the principles of reason, we may with great probability determine. The question I mean, is, Whether the world had an origin or not?

That there hath been an infinite, eternal, and independent series of finite, successive, and dependent beings, such as men, and consequently, that the world had no beginning, appears, from the bare consideration of the thing, extremely incredible, if not altogether absurd. The abstract argument used on this head, might appear too metaphysical and refined: I shall not therefore introduce it; but

† Essay II. Of a particular providence and future state.

shall recur to topics, which are more familiar, and which, though they do not demonstrate that it is absolutely impossible that *the world hath existed from eternity*, clearly evince, that it is highly improbable, or rather, certainly false. These topics I shall only mention, as they are pretty obvious, and have been often urged with great energy by the learned, both ancient and modern. Such are the late invention of letters, and of all the sciences and arts by which human life is civilized; the known origin of most nations, states, and kingdoms; and the first peopling of many countries. It is in our power at present to trace the history of every people backwards, to times of the greatest barbarity and ignorance. Europe, though not the largest of the four parts into which the earth is divided, is, on many accounts, the most considerable. But what a different face doth Europe wear at present, from what it wore three thousand years ago? How immense the odds in knowledge, in arts, in policy, in every thing? How easy is the intercourse, and how extensive the acquaintance, which men can now enjoy with all, even the remotest regions of the globe, compared with what was, or could have been enjoyed, in that time of darkness

and simplicity? A man differs not more from a child, than the human race now differs from the human race then. Three thousand years ago, appear indeed to mark a very distant epoch; and yet it is but as yesterday, compared with eternity. This, when duly weighed, every thinking person will acknowledge to be as strong moral evidence, as the subject can admit (and that I imagine is very strong), that the world had a beginning.

I shall make a supposition, which will perhaps appear whimsical, but which will tend to elucidate the argument I am enforcing. In antediluvian times, when the longevity of man was such as to include some centuries, I shall suppose, that a few boys had been transported to a desert island, and there left together, just old enough to make shift to sustain themselves, as those in the golden age are fabled to have done, on acorns, and other spontaneous productions of the soil. I shall suppose, that they had lived there for some hundreds of years, had remembered nothing of their coming into the island, nor of any other person whatsoever; and that thus they had never had access to know, or hear, of either birth or death. I shall suppose them to enter into a serious disquisition concerning

their own duration, the question having been started, Whether they had existed from eternity, or had once begun to be? They recur to memory : but memory can furnish them with nothing certain or decisive. If it must be allowed, that it contains no trace of a beginning of existence, it must also be allowed, that it reaches not beyond a few centuries at most. They observe besides, concerning this faculty, that the further back it goes, it becomes the more indistinct, terminating at last in confusion and darkness. Some things, however, they distinctly recollect, and are assured of. They remember, that they were once of much lower stature; and of smaller size; they had less bodily strength; and all their mental faculties were weaker. They know, that, in the powers of body and mind, they have advanced, by imperceptible degrees, to the pitch they are now arrived at. These considerations, especially when fortified by some analogous observations they might have made, on the growth of herbs and trees, would have shown the probability to be entirely on the side of those who asserted, that their existence had a beginning: And though, on account of the narrow sphere of their knowledge and experience, the argu-

ment could not have appeared to them in all its strength, we, from our larger acquaintance with nature, even abstracting from our knowledge of man in particular, must be satisfied, that it would have been strictly analogical and just. Exactly *similar*, the very *same*, I should rather say, is the argument I have been urging for the origination of the species. Make but a few alterations in phraseology ; for *memory*, substitute *history and tradition* ; for *hundreds of years*, say *thousands* ; for *the powers of body and mind*, put *the arts and sciences* ; and, with these, and perhaps one or two more such variations, you will find the argument as applicable in the one case, as in the other. Now, if it be granted, that the human species must have had a beginning, it will hardly be questioned, that every other animal species, or even that the universe, must have had a beginning.

BUT in order to prove the proposition laid down in the title of this section, it is not necessary to suppose that the world had a beginning. Admit it had not, and observe the consequence. Thus much must be admitted also, that not barely for a *long continued*, but for an ETERNAL succession of generations,

mankind were in a state little superior to the beasts ; that of a sudden, there came a most astonishing change upon the species ; that they exerted talents and capacities, of which there appeared not the smallest vestige, during the eternity preceding ; that they acquired such knowledge as procured them a kind of empire, not only over the vegetable and animal worlds, but even, in some respect, over the elements, and all the unwieldy powers of matter ; that, in consequence of this, they were quickly raised, much more above the state they had been formerly and eternally in, than such their former and eternal state was above that of the brute creation. If such a revolution in nature, such a thorough, general, and sudden change as this, would not be denominated miraculous, it is not in my power to conceive what would. I could not esteem it a greater miracle, hardly so great, that any species of beasts, which have hitherto been doomed to tread the earth, should now get wings, and float about in the air.

Nor will this plea be subverted by that trite objection, That mankind may have been as much enlightened, perhaps myriads of years ago, as they are at present ; but that by some *universal* calamity, such as de-

luge or conflagration, which, after the rotation of many centuries, the earth possibly becomes liable to, all traces of erudition and of science, all traces both of the elegant and of the useful arts, may have been effaced, and the human race, springing from a few who had escaped the common ruin, may have emerged anew, out of barbarity and ignorance. This hypothesis doth but substitute one miracle in the place of another. Such general disorder is entirely unconformable to our experience of the course of nature. Accordingly the destruction of the world by a deluge, the author hath numbered among those prodigies, or miracles, which render the Pentateuch perfectly incredible.

IF, on the contrary, we admit, that the world had a beginning, (and will not every thinking person acknowledge, that this position is much more probable than the contrary) ? the production of the world must be ascribed either to *chance*, or to *intelligence*.

Shall we derive all things, spiritual and corporeal, from a principle so insignificant as blind *chance* ? Shall we say, with Epicu-

rus, that the fortuitous concourse of ramb-
ling atoms hath reared this beautiful and
stupendous fabric? In that case, perhaps,
we should give an account of the origin of
things, which, most people will think, could
not properly be styled miraculous. But is
it, because the formation of a grand and
regular system in this way, is conformable
to the experienced order of nature? Quite
the reverse. Nothing can be more repug-
nant to universal experience, than that the
least organic body, not to mention the glori-
ous frame of nature, should be produced
by such a casual jumble. It has therefore,
in the highest degree possible, that particu-
lar quality of miracles, from which, accord-
ing to the author's theory, their incredibi-
lity results, and may doubtless, in this loose
acceptation of the word, be termed *miracu-
lous*. But should we affirm, that, to ac-
count thus for the origin of the universe, is
to account for it by miracle; we should be
thought, I am afraid, to speak both weak-
ly and improperly. There is something
here, if I may so express myself, which is
far beyond the miraculous; something, for
which I know not whether any language
can afford a proper appellation, unless it be

the general appellations of *absurdity* and *non-sense*.

Shall we then at last recur to the common doctrine, that the world was produced by an *intelligent cause*? On this supposition also, though incomparably the most rational, it is evident, that in the creation, formation, or first production of things, call it by what name you please, a power must have been exerted, which, in respect of the present course of nature, may be styled *miraculous*. I intend not to dispute about a word, nor to inquire, whether that term can, in strict propriety, be used of any exertions before the establishment of the laws of nature. I use the word in the same latitude, in which the author commonly useth it in his reasoning, for every event, that is not conformable to that course of nature with which we are acquainted by experience.

WHETHER, therefore, the world *had*, or *had not*, a *beginning*; whether, on the *first* supposition, the production of things be ascribed to *chance*, or to *design*; whether, on the *second*, in order to solve the numberless objections that arise, we *do*, or *do not*, recur to universal *catastrophes*; there is no possibili-

ty of accounting for the phenomena that presently come under our notice, without having at last recourse to MIRACLES ; that is, to events altogether unconformable, or, if you will, contrary to the present course of nature known to us by experience. I cannot conceive any hypothesis, which is not reducible to one or other of those above mentioned. Whoever imagines, that another might be framed, which is not comprehended in any of those, and which hath not as yet been devised by any system-builder ; let him make the experiment, and I will venture to prognosticate, that he will still find himself clogged with the same difficulty. The conclusion therefore above deduced, may be justly deemed, till the contrary is shown, to be not only the result of one, but alike of every hypothesis, of which the subject is susceptible.

THUS it hath been evinced, as was proposed, that abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence, that there have been, that there must have been, *miracles* in former times, or such events, as, when compared with the present constitution of the world, would by Mr. Hume be denominated miraculous.

SECT. VII.

Revisal of Mr. Hume's examination of the Pentateuch.

ALLOWING to the conclusion deduced in the foregoing section its proper weight, I shall also take into consideration the *Pentateuch*, or five books of Moses ; or rather, I shall endeavour impartially to revise the examination which those books have already undergone by the essayist *. It is, in this case, of the greatest importance to know, whether the evidence on both sides hath been fairly stated.

" HERE then we are at first to consider " a book," which is acknowledged, on all hands, to be the most ancient record in the world, " presented to us," we admit, " by a " barbarous and ignorant people †," at the same time exhibiting a system of *Theism*, or

* P. 205.

† The author adds, " wrote in an age when they " were still more barbarous." These words I have omitted in the revisal, because they appear to me unintelligible. The age in which the *Pentateuch* was written, is indirectly compared to another age, he says not what : and all we can make of it is, that this people were more barbarous at that time than at some other time, nobody knows when.

natural religion, which is both rational and sublime ; with which nothing that was ever compiled or produced, on this subject, in the most enlightened ages, by the most learned and polished nations, who were unacquainted with that book, will bear to be compared.

Mr. Hume himself must allow, that this remark deserves attention, since his reasoning in another performance, which he calls *The natural history of religion*, would lead us to expect the contrary. He there maintains, that *Polytheism* and *Idolatry* are, and must be, the religion of rude and barbarous, and consequently of ancient ages ; that the true principles of *Theism*, or the belief of one almighty and wise being, the creator, the preserver, and the ruler of heaven and earth, results from the greatest improvements of the understanding in philosophy and science. To suppose the contrary, says he, is supposing, that “ while men were ignorant and barbarous, “ they discovered truth ; but fell into error, “ as soon as they acquired learning and politeness*.” This reasoning is just, wherever religion is to be considered as the result of human reflections. What account ther

* *Natural history of religion*, I.

will the author give of this wonderful exception? That the reverse is here the case, it is impossible for him to dissemble. The people he himself calls ignorant and barbarous; yet they are not idolaters or polytheists. At the time when the book, which he examines, was composed, he seems to think, they even exceeded themselves in barbarity; yet the sentiments of these barbarians, on the subject of religion, the sentiments which that very book presents to us, may well put to silence the wisdom of the politest nations on the earth. Need I remind Mr. Hume of his express declaration, that if a traveller were transported into any unknown region, and found the inhabitants "ignorant and barbarous, he might beforehand declare them idolaters, and there is "*scarce* a POSSIBILITY of his being mistaken en*?" I know no satisfactory account that can be given of this exception, on the principles of the essayist. Nevertheless, nothing is more easy, than to give a satisfactory account of it, on the Christian principles. This account is that which is given by the book itself. It is, that the religious tenets of that nation were not the result of

* Natural History of Religion, I.

their reasonings, but proceeded from divine revelation. The contrast we discern betwixt the ISRAELITES, and the ancient GREEKS and ROMANS, is remarkable. The GREEKS and ROMANS, on all the subjects of human erudition, on all the liberal and the useful arts, reasoned like *men*; on the subject of religion, they prated like *children*. The ISRAELITES, on the contrary, in all the sciences and arts, were *children*; but, in their notions of religion, they were *men*; in the doctrines, for example, of the unity, the eternity, the omnipotence, the omniscience, the omnipresence, the wisdom, and the goodness of God; in their opinions concerning providence, and the creation, preservation and government of the world; opinions so exalted and comprehensive, as even by the author's acknowledgment, could never enter into the thoughts of barbarians.

But to proceed in the revival: We have here a book, says the essayist, "wrote in all probability long after the facts it relates." That this book was written long after *some* of the facts it relates, is not indeed denied; that it was written long after *all*, or even *most* of those facts, I see no reason to believe. If Mr. Hume meant to signify, by the ex-

pression quoted, that this was in all probability the case, why did he not produce the grounds on which the probability is founded? Shall a bold assertion pass for argument? or can it be expected, that any one should consider reasons, which are only in general supposed, but not specified?

He adds, “ corroborated by no *concurring* testimony ;” as little, say I, invalidated by any *contradicting* testimony ; and both, for this plain reason, because there is no human composition, that can be compared with this, in respect of antiquity. But though this book is not corroborated by the concurrent testimony of any coeval histories, because, if there ever were such histories, they are not now extant ; it is not therefore destitute of all collateral evidence. The following examples of this kind of evidence deserve some notice. The division of time into weeks, which hath obtained in many countries, for instance among the Egyptians, Chinese, Indians, and northern barbarians ; nations whereof some had little or no intercourse with others, and were not even known by name to the Hebrews* :

* The judicious reader will observe, that there is a great difference between the concurrence of nations in

the tradition which in several places prevailed concerning the primeval chaos from which the world arose, the production of all living creatures out of water and earth, by the efficiency of a supreme mind *, the forma-

the division of time into *weeks*, and their concurrence in the other periodical divisions, into *years*, *months*, and *days*. These divisions arise from such natural causes, as are every where obvious; the annual and diurnal revolutions of the sun, and the revolution of the moon. The division into *weeks*, on the contrary, seems perfectly arbitrary: consequently its prevailing in distant countries, among nations which had no communication with one another, affords a strong presumption, that it must have been derived from some tradition (as that of the creation) which hath been older than the dispersion of mankind into different regions. It is easy to conceive, that the practice, in rude and barbarous ages, might remain through habit, when the tradition, on which it was founded, was entirely lost; it is easy to conceive, that afterwards, people addicted to idolatry, or who, like the Egyptians, had become proficient in astronomy, should assign to the different days of the week, the names of their deities, or of the planets.

* This in particular merits our attention the more, that it cannot, by any explication, be made to agree with the doctrine which obtained among the Pagans, commonly called *the Mythology*. Ovid is so sensible of this, that, when he mentions a deity as the efficient cause of the creation, he leaves him, as it were, de-

tion of man last of all, in the image of God, and his being vested with dominion over

tached from those of the popular system, which it was his business as a poet to deliver, being at a loss what name to give him, or what place in nature to assign him. *Quisquis fuit ille deorum. Whichever of the gods it was.* He well knew that, in all the catalogue of their divinities, the god who made the world was not to be found, that these divinities themselves were, on the contrary, produced out of the chaos, as well as men and beasts. Mr. Hume, in his *Natural history of religion*, IV. remarks this conduct in Ovid, and ascribes it to his having lived in a learned age, and having been instructed by philosophers in the principle of a divine formation of the world. For my part, I very much question, whether any nation was ever yet indebted, for this principle, to the disquisitions of philosophers. Had this opinion ever been heard of, till the Augustan age, it might indeed have been suspected, that it was the daughter of philosophy and science, but so far is this from being the case, that some vestiges of it may be traced even in the earliest, and most ignorant times. Thales the Milesian, who lived many centuries before Ovid, had, as Cicero, in his first book *De Natura Deorum*, informs us, attributed the origin of all things to God. Anaxagoras had also denominated the forming principle, which severed the elements, created the world, and brought order out of confusion, *intelligence* or *mind*. It is therefore much more probable that these ancients owed this doctrine to a tradition handed down from the earliest ages, which even all the absurdities of the theology they had em-

the other animals, the primitive state of innocence and happiness : the subsequent debased had not been able totally to erase, though these absurdities could never be made to coalesce with this doctrine. At the same time I acknowledge, that there is something so noble and so rational in the principle, *That the world was produced by an intelligent cause*, that sound philosophy will ever be ready to adopt it, when once it is proposed. But that this opinion is not the offspring of philosophy, may be reasonably deduced from this consideration also, that they were not the most enlightened or philosophic nations, amongst whom it was maintained in greatest purity. I speak not of the Hebrews. Even the Parthians, Medes and Persians, whom the Greeks considered as barbarians, were genuine theists, and notwithstanding many superstitious practices which prevailed among them, they held the belief of one eternal God, the creator and lord of the universe. If this principle is to be derived from the utmost improvement of the mind in ratiocination and science, which is Mr. Hume's hypothesis, the phenomenon just now observed is unaccountable. If, on the contrary, it is to be derived originally from revelation, preserved by tradition, through successive generations, nothing can more easily be accounted for. Traditions are always longest retained, and most purely transmitted, in or near the place where they were first received, and amongst a people who possess a strong attachment to their ancient laws and customs. Migrations into distant countries, mixture of different nations, revolutions in government and manners, yea and ingenuity itself, all

generacy of mankind : their destruction by a flood : and the preservation of one family in a vessel. Nay, which is still stronger, I might plead the vestiges of some such catastrophe as the deluge, which the shells and other marine bodies, that are daily dug out of the bowels of the earth, in places remote from the sea, do clearly exhibit to us : I might urge the traces, which still remain in ancient histories, of the migration

contribute to corrupt tradition, and do sometimes wholly efface it. This I take to be the only admissible account, why so rational and so philosophical a principle prevailed most in ages and countries in which reason and philosophy seemed to be but in their infancy. The notion, that the Greeks borrowed their opinions on this subject from the books of Moses, a notion for which some Jewish writers, some Christian fathers, and even some moderns have warmly contended, appears void of all foundation. These opinions in Greece, as hath been observed, were of a very early date ; whereas that there existed such a people as the Jews, seems scarce to have been known there till about the time of the Macedonian conquests. No sooner were they known than they were hated, and their laws and customs universally despised. Nor is there the shadow of reason to think, that the Greeks knew any thing of the sacred writings, till a considerable time afterwards, when that version of them was made into their language which is called *The translation of the Seventy*.

of people and of science from Asia (which hath not improperly been styled *the cradle of the arts*) into many parts both of Africa and Europe : I might plead the coincidence of those migrations, and of the origin of states and kingdoms, with the time of the dispersion of the posterity of Noah.

But to return, the author subjoins, “ resembling those fabulous accounts, which every nation gives of its origin.” It is unluckily the fate of holy writ, with this author, that both its resemblance, and its want of resemblance, to the accounts of other authors, are alike presumptions against it. He hath not indeed told us, wherein it resembles fabulous accounts ; and, for my part, though the charge were just, I should imagine, little or nothing to the disadvantage of the Pentateuch, could be deduced from it. It is universally agreed among the learned, that even the most absurd fables of idolaters, derive their origin from facts, which having been, in barbarous ages, transmitted only by oral tradition, have come at length to be grossly corrupted and disfigured. It is nevertheless probable, that such fictions would still retain some striking features of of those truths from which they sprung.

And if the books of Moses resemble, in any thing, the fabulous accounts of other nations, it would not perhaps be difficult to prove, that they resemble only whatever is least fabulous in these accounts. That this will be found to be the case, we may reasonably presume, even from what hath been observed already ; and if so, the resemblance, so far from being an argument against those books, is evidently an argument in their favour. In order to remove any doubt that may remain on this head, it ought to be attended to, that, in a number of concurrent testimonies (where there could have been no previous concert), there is a probability independent of that which results from our faith in the witnesses ; nay, should the witnesses be of such a character as to merit no faith at all. This probability ariseth from the *concurrence* itself. That such a concurrence should spring from *chance*, is as one to infinite, in other words, morally impossible ; if, therefore, concert be excluded, there remains no other cause but the reality of the fact.

It is true, that, “ upon reading this book, “ we find it full of prodigies and miracles ;” but it is also true, that many of those mi-

racles are such, as the subject it treats of, must unavoidably make us expect. For a proof of this position, I need but refer the reader to the principles established in the preceding section. No book in the world do we find written in a more simple style; no where does there appear in it, the least affectation of ornament; yet nowhere else is the Almighty represented, as either acting or speaking in a manner so becoming the eternal ruler of the world. Compare the account of the CREATION which is given by *Moses*, with the ravings of Sanchoniatho the *Phenician* philosopher, which he hath dignified with the title of COSMOGONY; or compare it with the childish extravagancies of the *Greek* and the *Latin* poets, so justly likened by the author to a *sick man's dreams**; and then say, whether any person of candour and discernment will not be disposed to exclaim in the words of the prophet, *What is the CHAFF to the WHEAT*†! The account is what we should call, in reference to our experience, *miraculous*. But was it possible it should be otherwise? I believe the greatest infidel will not deny, that

* Natural History of Religion, XV.

† Jer. xxiii. 28.

it is at least as plausible an opinion, that the world had a beginning, as that it had not. If it had, can it be imagined by any man in his senses, that that particular quality should be an objection to the narrative, which he previously knows it must have? Must not the first production of things, the original formation of animals and vegetables, require exertions of power, which, in preservation and propagation, can never be exemplified?

It will perhaps be objected, That if the miracles continued no longer, and extended no further, than the necessity of creation required, this reasoning would be just; but that in fact they both continued much longer, and extended much further. The answer is obvious: It is impossible for us to judge, how far the necessity of the case required. Immediately after the creation, things must have been in a state very different from that which they are in at present. How long that state might continue, we have not the means of discovering: but as, in human infancy, it is necessary that the feeble creature should, for some time, be carried in the nurse's arms, and afterwards, by the help of leading-strings, be kept from

falling, before he acquire strength to walk ; it is not unlikely, that, in the infancy of the world, such interpositions should be more frequent and requisite, till nature attaining a certain maturity, those laws and that constitution should be established, which we now experience. It will greatly strengthen this conclusion, to reflect, that in every species of natural productions with which we are acquainted, we invariably observe a similar feebleness in the individuals on their first appearance, and a similar gradation towards a state of greater perfection and stability. Besides, if we acknowledge the necessity of the exertion of a power, which only in reference to our experience is called miraculous ; the question, as is well observed by the judicious prelate formerly quoted *, “ whether this “ power stopped immediately, after it had “ made man, or went on and exerted itself “ farther, is a question of the same kind, as “ whether an ordinary power exerted itself “ in such a particular degree and manner, or “ not.” It cannot therefore, if we think reasonably on this subject, greatly astonish us, that such a book should give “ an account “ of a state of the world, and of human na-

* Analogy of religion, &c. part 2. chap. 2. sect. 2.

“ ture, entirely different from the present ;
“ of our fall from that state ; of the age of
“ man extended to near a thousand years ;
“ and of the destruction of the world by a
“ deluge.”

Finally, if, in such a book, mingled with the excellencies I have remarked, there should appear some difficulties, some things for which we are not able to account ; for instance, “ the arbitrary choice of one people, as the “ favourites of Heaven ; and their deliver-
“ ance from bondage by prodigies the most
“ astonishing imaginable ;” is there any thing more extraordinary here, than, in a composition of this nature, we might have previously expected to find ? We must be immoderately conceited of our own understandings, if we imagine otherwise. Those favourites of Heaven, it must be likewise owned, are the countrymen of the writer ; but of such a writer, as of all historians or annalists, ancient or modern, shows the least disposition to flatter his countrymen. Where, I pray, do we find him, either celebrating their virtues, or palliating their vices ; either extolling their genius, or magnifying their exploits ? Add to all these, that, in every thing which is not expressly ascribed to the interposal of Heaven, the relation is in itself plausible, the incidents

are natural, the characters and manners such as are admirably adapted to those early ages of the world. In these particulars, there is no affectation of the marvellous; there are no "descriptions of sea and land monsters; no "relations of wonderful adventures, strange "men, and uncouth manners *."

WHEN all these things are seriously attended to, I persuade myself, that no unprejudiced person will think, that the Pentateuch bears falsehood on the face of it, and deserves to be rejected without examination. On the contrary, every unprejudiced person will find (I say not, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than all the miracles it relates; this is a language which I do not understand, and which only serves to darken a plain question; but I say, he will find) very many and very strong indications of authenticity and truth; and will conclude, that all the evidences, both intrinsic and extrinsic, by which it is supported, ought to be impartially canvassed. Abundant evidences there are of both kinds; some hints of them have been given in this section; but to consider them fully, falls not within the limits of my present purpose.

* P. 185.

CONCLUSION.

WHAT is the sum of all that hath been now discussed? It is briefly this: *That the author's favourite argument, of which he boasts the discovery, is founded in error**, is managed with sophistry†, and is at last abandoned by its inventor‡, as fit only for show, not for use; that he is not more successful in the collateral arguments he employs; particularly, that there is no peculiar presumption against religious miracles||; that, on the contrary, there is a peculiar presumption in their favour**; that the general maxim, whereby he would enable us to decide betwixt opposite miracles, when it is stripped of the pompous diction, that serves it at once for decoration and for disguise, is discovered to be no other than an identical proposition, which, as it conveys no knowledge, can be of no service to the cause of truth††; that there is no presumption, arising either from human nature‡‡, or from the history of mankind|||, against the miracles said to have been wrought in proof of

* Part 1. sect. 1.

|| Sect. 4.

‡‡ Part 2. sect. 1.

† Sect. 2.

** Sect. 5.

||| Sect. 2.

‡ Sect. 3.

†† Sect. 6.

Christianity ; that the evidence of these is not subverted by those miracles which historians of other religions have recorded ; that neither the Pagan †, nor the Popish ‡ miracles, on which he hath expatiated, will bear to be compared with those of holy writ ; that, abstracting from the evidence for particular facts, we have irrefragable evidence, that there have been miracles in former times || ; and, lastly, that his examination of the Pentateuch is both partial and imperfect, and consequently stands in need of a revision**.*

“OUR most holy religion,” says the author in the conclusion of his essay, “is founded
“on faith, not on reason ; and it is a sure
“method of exposing it, to put it to such a
“trial, as it is by no means fitted to endure.”
If, by *our most holy religion*, we are to understand the fundamental articles of the Christian system, these have their foundation in the nature and decrees of God ; and, as they are antecedent to our faith or reasonings, they must be also independent of both. If they are true, our disbelief can never make them false ; if they are false, the belief of all

* Part 2. sect. 3.

† Sect. 4.

‡ Sect. 5.

|| Sect. 6.

** Sect. 7.

the world will never make them true. But as the only question between Mr. Hume and the defenders of the gospel, is, Whether there is reason to believe those articles? he can only mean by *our most holy religion*, our belief of the Christian doctrine: and concerning this belief we are told, that it is founded on *faith*, not on reason; that is, our faith is founded on our faith; in other words, it hath no foundation, it is a mere chimera, the creature of a distempered brain. I say not, on the contrary, that *our most holy religion* is founded on *reason*, because this expression, in my opinion, is both ambiguous and inaccurate; but I say, that we have sufficient reason for the belief of our religion; or, to express myself in the words of an apostle, that the Christian, if it is not his own fault, may *be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh him a REASON of his hope*.

So far therefore am I from being afraid of exposing Christianity, by submitting it to the test of reason; so far am I from judging this a trial, which it is by no means fitted to endure, that I think, on the contrary, the most violent attacks that have been made upon the faith of Jesus, have been of service to it. Yes: I do not hesitate to affirm, that our re-

ligion hath been indebted to the *attempts*, though not to the *intentions*, of its bitterest enemies. They have tried its strength indeed, and, by trying, they have displayed its strength; and that in so clear a light, as we could never have hoped, without such a trial, to have viewed it in. Let them therefore write, let them argue, and, when arguments fail, even let them cavil, against religion, as much as they please: I should be heartily sorry, that ever in this island, the asylum of liberty, where the spirit of Christianity is better understood (however defective the inhabitants are in the observance of its precepts) than in any other part of the Christian world; I should, I say, be sorry, that in this island, so great a disservice were done to religion, as to check its adversaries, in any other way, than by returning a candid answer to their objections. I must at the same time acknowledge, that I am both ashamed and grieved, when I observe any friends of religion, betray so great a diffidence in the goodness of their cause (for to this diffidence it can only be imputed) as to show an inclination for recurring to more forcible methods. The assaults of infidels, I may venture to prophesy, will never overturn our religion. They will

prove not more hurtful to the Christian system, if it is allowed *to compare small things with greatest*, than the boisterous winds are said to prove to the sturdy oak. They shake it impetuously for a time, and loudly threaten its subversion; whilst, in effect, they only serve to make it strike its roots the deeper, and stand the firmer ever after.

ONE word more with the essayist, and I have done. "upon the whole," says he, "we
" may conclude, that the *Christian religion*,
" not only was at first attended with miracles,
" but even, at this day, cannot be believed
" by any reasonable person without one.
" Mere reason is insufficient to convince us
" of its veracity; and whoever is moved by
" faith to assent to it;" that is, whoever by
his belief is induced to believe it, "is conscious
" of a continued miracle in his own person,
" which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination
" to believe, what is most contrary to custom
" and experience." An author is never so sure
of writing unanswerably, as when he writes altogether unintelligibly. It is impossible that you should fight your enemy before you find him; and if he hath screened himself in dark-

ness, it is next to impossible that you should find him. Indeed, if any meaning can be gathered from that strange assemblage of words just now quoted, it seems to be one or other of these which follow: *either*, That there are not any in the world, who believe the gospel; *or*, That there is no want of miracles in our own time. How either of these remarks, if just, can contribute to the author's purpose, it will not, I suspect, be easy to discover. If the second remark is true, if there is no want of miracles at present, surely experience cannot be pleaded against the belief of miracles said to have been performed in time past. Again, if the first remark is true, if there are not any in the world who believe the gospel, because, as Mr. Hume supposeth, a miracle cannot be believed without a new miracle, why all this ado to refute opinions which nobody entertains? Certainly, to use his own words, "The knights-errant, who
" wandered about to clear the world of dra-
" gons and giants, never entertained the least
" doubt concerning the existence of these
" monsters *."

* See the first paragraph of Essay 12. Of the academical or sceptical philosophy.

Might I presume faintly to copy but the manner of so inimitable an original, as the author hath exhibited in his concluding words, I should also conclude upon the whole, That miracles are capable of proof from testimony, and that there is a full proof of this kind, for those said to have been wrought in support of Christianity; that whoever is moved, by Mr Hume's ingenious argument, to assert, that no testimony can give sufficient evidence of miracles, admits for *reason*, though perhaps unconscious, a mere *subtilty*, which subverts the evidence of testimony, of history, and even of experience itself, giving him a determination to deny, what the common sense of mankind, founded in the primary principles of the understanding, would lead him to believe.

THE END.

26 JY 66

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